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Brussels & Bruges

with Ghent & Antwerp

2nd Edition

by George McDonald

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"Amazingly easy to use. Very portable, very complete."
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—Glamour Magazine

"Hotel information is close to encyclopedic."
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"Frommer's Guides have a way of giving you a real feel for a place."
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VISIT…

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About the Author

George McDonald has lived and worked in Brussels, as editor-in-chief of the in-flight magazine for Sabena. Now a freelance journalist and travel writer, he has written extensively on Belgium for magazines and for travel books that include *Frommer's Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg; Frommer's Europe;* and *Frommer's Europe from $70 a Day*. He's also the author of *Frommer's Amsterdam.*

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To John Sparrow, whose enthusiasm for covering—and uncovering—the secrets of the "masterpiece called Belgium," I've done my best to emulate.

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—George McDonald

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

Frommer's Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg
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Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

Finds	Special finds—those places only insiders know about
Fun Fact	Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
Kids	Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
Moments	Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
Overrated	Places or experiences not worth your time or money
Tips	Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
Value	Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE American Express	DISC Discover	V Visa
DC Diners Club	MC MasterCard	

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Now that you have the guidebook to a great trip, visit our website at **www.frommers.com** for travel information on more than 3,000 destinations. With features updated regularly, we give you instant access to the most current trip-planning information available. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the best prices on airfares, accommodations, and car rentals—and you can even book travel online through our travel booking partners. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the following:

- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp

Well, the long-predicted, much-feared slide in value of the U.S. dollar against the euro never happened—instead, the dollar went off a cliff. In the first edition of this guidebook, we didn't even bother to provide U.S. dollar equivalents of euro amounts, because the two currencies were so close to 1 for 1 parity that you couldn't have slipped a dollar bill between them. Had there been an edition of this book 2 years before the first one (which there wasn't, of course), a dollar would then have bought you close to 1.20€, at a time when Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp were a happy spending ground for U.S. tourists. At this writing, a dollar will buy you around 80 euro cents, and American visitors to those same cities are looking mighty close at sticker prices before buying, and at tabs before deciding how much of a tip, if any, is in order.

Canadian, British, Australian, and New Zealander visitors aren't wearing such long faces, since their currencies haven't gone down as far and as fast. But all of the above could wish for the luck of the Irish, who both earn and spend euros, and who are walking the streets of Europe with even more of a spring than usual in their steps.

And now for the good news: With euro-zone economies scrabbling slowly and uncertainly out of a 4-year recession, European consumers, Belgians among them, are looking just as closely at prices as are most foreign visitors. In many cases, hotel, restaurant, store, and entertainment tabs have not gone up by much, if at all, and transportation prices by only a smidgeon. There are plenty of bargains to be had. This means that you should shop around, and in hotels don't hesitate to wave a fistful of dollars, pounds, or plastic in their faces, and say "C'mon, surely you can do better than that!"

GETTING THERE **Air New Zealand** (✆ **0800/737-000;** www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to London, where you can transfer for Brussels. **VLM Airlines** (www.vlm-airlines.com) has daily flights from London City, Manchester, and Liverpool airports in the U.K. to Brussels and Antwerp. See chapter 2 for more details.

WHERE TO STAY In Brussels the already great little hotel **Welcome,** quai au Bois-à-Brûler 23, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/219-95-46**), got greater still, with the completion of its project to become a country *auberge* in the heart of town. Its 17 rooms will likely be harder to book than ever, now that each one is fitted out, carefully and conscientiously, in a different international style. Sadly, the hotel's equally great seafood restaurant La Truite d'Argent has closed. See chapter 3 for more details.

WHERE TO DINE Ghent's great seafood restaurant **Guido Meerschaut** moved out of town to the nearby

village of Sint-Martens-Latem. Another fine restaurant, the **Auberge de Fonteyne,** Gouden Leeuwplein 7 (✆ **09/224-24-54**), that had closed while its old guild headquarters setting was being renovated, has reopened. The restaurant Ghost, part of the Graaf van Egmond restaurant complex, has had a name change: It is now called the **Crypte,** Korenlei 24 (✆ **09/233-06-95**). See chapter 6 for more details.

WHAT TO SEE & DO **Brussels** The city has introduced the **Brussels Card,** a chip-enabled plastic card, to smooth access for visitors. The card, which costs 30€ ($38), is enabled for 3 days and affords free or reduced admission to around 30 city museums and attractions, along with free use of public transportation and discounts on a range of other services. See chapter 3 for more details.

After 25 years of devoted service, the cuddly kangaroo mascot has been shown the door at the children's theme park **Walibi,** rue J. Dechamps 9, Wavre (✆ **010/42-15-00**), southeast of Brussels. And that's not all folks—the park's U.S. owners changed the name from the much-loved (if baffling) Walibi to (the scarcely less baffling) **Six Flags Belgium.** In "compensation" for a blow to the national psyche as painful as when Jean-Claude Van Damme upped muscles and decamped to Hollywood, Six Flags introduced Bugs Bunny, Tweetie Pie, and other stars of the cartoon firmament from across the pond.

Fans of the city's superb legacy of Art Nouveau architecture should check out the works of Gustave Strauven (1878–1919), the Brussels-born student of master Victor Horta. Strauven's signature is his use of blue and yellow bricks. He built the Maison Saint-Cyr on Square Ambiorix, and around 100 private homes in Brussels and Tournai. A private enthusiast is restoring his home from 1902 at rue Luther 28. See chapter 4 for more details.

BRUGES The bright glow that enveloped **Bruges** as European Capital of Culture has now faded in the rear-view mirror, but the city has taken delivery of some shiny new cultural assets, which will be a permanent legacy of its moment in the limelight. Foremost among these is a new opera and concert hall, the **Concertgebouw,** 't Zand (✆ **050/47-69-99**). See chapter 5 for more details.

OSTEND In Belgium's faded but still lively "Queen of the Coast," refurbishment has ended at the plush but ugly, modernist **Casino-Kursaal Oostende,** Monacoplein (✆ **059/70-51-11**). See chapter 5 for more details.

GHENT The city's **Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Fine Arts Museum),** Citadelpark (✆ **09/222-17-03**), has closed temporarily for renovations. During this time most of the collection can be viewed at the nearby **Leopold Barracks,** Charles de Kerchovelaan 187A (✆ **09/240-07-00**). See chapter 6 for more details.

ANTWERP Antwerp has plenty of style, and a roster of top fashion designers, and now it has the Antwerp Fashion Museum **MoMu,** Nationalestraat 28 (✆ **03/470-27-70**)—MoMu is an *a la mode* contraction of "Mode Museum." A futuristic aquarium, **Aquatopia,** Koningin Astridplein 7 (✆ **03/205-07-40**), containing exotic fish, has opened in the center of town, opposite Centraal Station. Aquatopia is in the Astrid Park Plaza Hotel complex, at the corner of Astridplein and Van Wesenbekestraat. See chapter 7 for more details.

1

The Best of Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp

This is a tale of two cities—and of two more, for good measure. Any country of the size and with the population of Belgium, which covers about the same area as Maryland and has 10 million inhabitants, would be proud to possess two cities of the character of Brussels and Bruges. Both are famed around the world for their wealth of historical attractions, art, culture, and cuisine. It is equally interesting to note that Ghent and Antwerp are scarcely behind their two better-known cousins in these respects, if behind at all, which their own residents would certainly dispute.

Ghent and Antwerp are often linked with Bruges as the "Three Flemish Art Cities." Though just about everyone admits that Ghent and Antwerp can't match Bruges for sheer good looks, many Belgians believe them to be the true heartland of Flemish culture. Both cities have a grittier, more lived-in feel compared to Bruges's museum-piece air, and neither would yield a millimeter in any argument over relative historical importance, artistic heritage, and contemporary vibrancy.

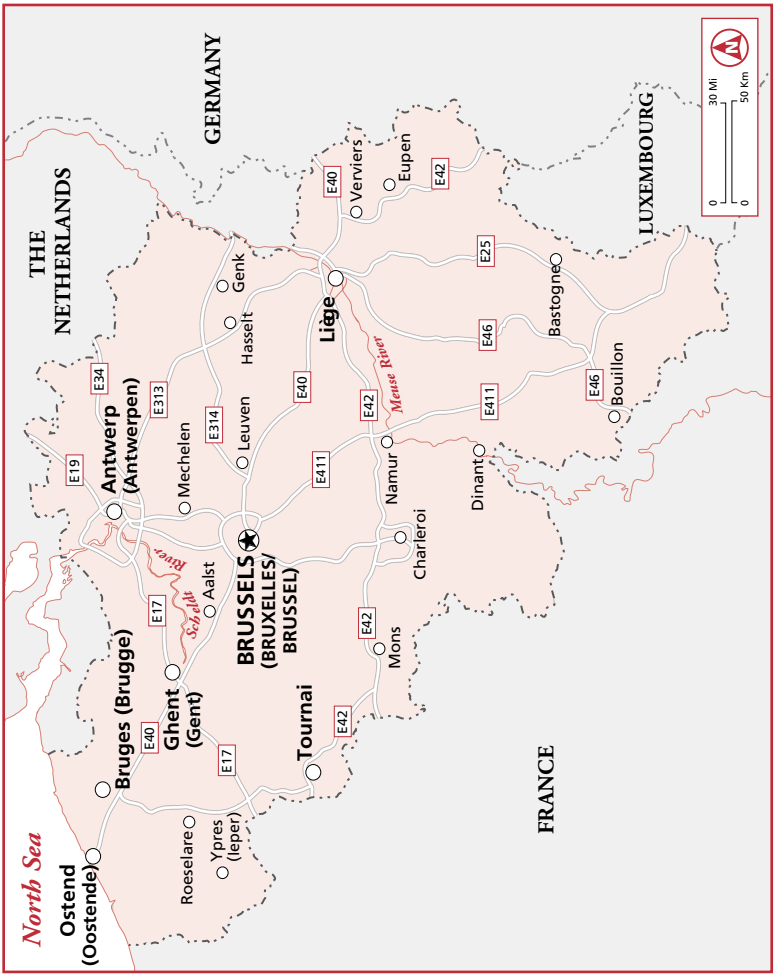
If time is limited, I'd always advise choosing Brussels and Bruges ahead of Ghent and Antwerp. But just a few more days brings the latter two places within range, and you miss much if you don't reach out and grab them. Around the big four twinkles a constellation of small towns, such as Mechelen, Ostend, and Lier, that add icing to the cake with their own decided merits.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **View the Grand-Place for the First Time** (Brussels): There's nothing quite like strolling out of one of its unremarkable side streets onto the historic Grand-Place. You'll never forget your first look at this timeless cobbled square, surrounded by gabled guild houses and the Gothic tracery of the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) and the Maison du Roi (King's House). See p. 87.
- **Shoot *Manneken-Pis*** (Brussels): We mean with a camera, of course. The centuries-old fountain-statue of a small boy making water with a "what-a-clever-boy-am-I" look on his face, has become a much-loved symbol of the city, and a metaphor for its brand of irreverent humor. Nobody can resist this statue of a gleefully tinkling little boy. Why should you be any different? See p. 99.
- **Admire Art Nouveau** (Brussels): Brussels considers itself the world capital of Art Nouveau, and local architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) was its foremost exponent. You can view the master's colorful, sinuous style at his

former home, now the **Horta Museum,** and in buildings around the city. See p. 96.

- **Visit the Comic-Strip Museum** (Brussels): Cast aside any thoughts of Superman and Batman. Belgian comic-strip art is an altogether more sophisticated product, though its most famous creation, Hergé's Tintin, proves it can also be fun. See p. 105.
- **Stand Under the Seven Giant Spheres of the Atomium** (Brussels): And hope that none of the giant spheres of this colossal representation of an iron atom will fall on your head. Next to this monstrous model, 165 billion times bigger than the real thing, you'll be the one who feels like a microscopic particle. See p. 103.
- **Stroll Around Europe** (Brussels): Mini-Europe, that is. This collection of emblematic buildings from the European Union's member nations includes the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Big Ben, the Acropolis, the Arc de Triomphe, the Brandenburg Gate, and more, all in beautifully rendered 1:25-scale detail. See p. 104.
- **Take a Hike** (Brussels): Nowhere has Brussels more green than in the Forêt de Soignes, which stretches from the Bois de la Cambre to Waterloo. This is a great place to escape maddening crowds and fuming traffic. See p. 105.
- **Enjoy Opera at La Monnaie** (Brussels): Belgium's 1830 war of independence broke out during a performance at this graceful neoclassical theater—so you never can tell what an evening at the opera has in store. See p. 117.
- **Refight the Battle of Waterloo** (Brussels): They actually do "refight" the great 1815 battle in a reenactment every 5 years on its anniversary (the next will be in June 2005). Otherwise, settle for climbing the Lion Mound on the battlefield south of Brussels for a magnificent view over this theater of war. See p. 124.
- **Cruise the Canals** (Bruges): Those open-top canal boats can be scorching in hot weather and bracing in cold, but they're fun and they afford you a uniquely satisfying view of the city. There's even a stern-wheel paddle steamer that sails along the canal to the nearby village of Damme. See p. 158.
- **Bicycle Through Town** (Bruges): Unlike most Belgian cities, Bruges has made bicyclists privileged road users, with rights of way that motorists would kill for. You can ride through the city, around it on the ring canal park, and outside it on fresh-air excursions. See p. 129.
- **Skate the Canals** (Bruges): Whenever the canals freeze solid in winter—and sadly, this happens only rarely—you can strap on a pair of ice skates and tour the center of town. Be sure to wait until plenty of the locals are doing this, and only skate where they do, since they're likely to know when it's safe and where it's safe (not under bridges, for instance).
- **Visit with Rubens** (Antwerp): Touch Antwerp's cultural heart at the Rubens House, where the great Flemish artist lived and worked. You can tour its period rooms, baroque portico, and Renaissance garden. Among a dozen Rubens works on display are a self-portrait and a portrait of Anthony Van Dyck as a boy. See p. 200.



2 The Best Art Collections

- **Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (Royal Museums of Fine Arts;** Brussels): The city's premier historical art and modern art collections are together in a single institution, though not exactly under one roof—you go underground to the modern section. These two museums contain a memorable panoply of art, from some of the finest works of Flemish old masters, such as Brueghel, Rubens, Van Dyck, and Frans Hals, to Magritte, Delvaux, and Permeke. See p. 97.
- **Groeninge Museum** (Bruges): Size matters, but it isn't everything. Although relatively small

compared to the great art museums in Brussels and Antwerp, Bruges's municipal fine-arts museum makes up in quality for what it lacks in size. How could it be otherwise when it houses the country's finest collection of works by the Flemish Primitives? This includes paintings by Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, Rogier van der Weyden, and others. See p. 146.

- **Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen (Royal Museum of Fine Arts;** Antwerp): Should you be an admirer of the great Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and all his works, you've come to the right place here, in the city where he made his home and his fortune. Antwerp's finest museum houses a gallery of his best works and backs this up with those of many other Flemish old masters, among them Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Dirck Bouts, and Hans Memling. See p. 199.

3 The Best Castles & Stately Homes

- **Kasteel Beersel** (Brussels): This 13th-century castle just 8km (5 miles) south of Brussels, looks to be the ideal place for pulling up the drawbridge and settling in for a siege—and if the owners have had the foresight to amply stock the rustic Auberge Kasteel Beersel restaurant inside, the proceedings need not be too burdensome. This is a castle just like Disney makes them, with turrets, three towers, a drawbridge, a moat, and the spirits of all those who have, willingly or unwillingly, resided within its walls. See p. 125.
- **Gravensteen** (**Castle of the Counts;** Ghent): Even more than 900 years after it was built, the castle of the Counts in Ghent can still summon up a chilly feeling of dread as you look at its gray stone walls. It's a grim reminder that castles were not all for chivalrous knights and beautiful princesses; this one was intended as much to cow the independent-minded citizens of Ghent as to protect the city from foreign marauders. Inside are the tools of the autocrat's profession: torture instruments that show that what the Middle Ages lacked in humanity they made up for in invention. See p. 176.

4 The Best Historic Sights

- **Hôtel de Ville** (**Town Hall;** Brussels): Both the inside and the outside of this magnificent Gothic work repay careful study. The sculptors who created its intricate exterior decoration had a sense of humor—or at any rate what passed for a sense of humor in the Middle Ages—as well as skill. And the interior is lavish enough even for the extravagant tastes of the imperial aldermen who ruled over the city from here. See p. 90.
- **Galeries Royales St-Hubert** (**St. Hubert Royal Galleries;** Brussels): One of Europe's oldest "shopping malls," the Italian neo-Renaissance style gallery with three connected wings opened in 1847, and is still a fine place to shop and to stroll through window-shopping. See p. 112.
- **Prinselijk Begijnhof ten Wijngaarde** (**Princely Beguinage of the Vineyard;** Bruges): More commonly known just as the

Begijnhof, this conventlike ring of small houses surrounding a central lawn has been an oasis of peace in Bruges through the centuries since it was founded in 1245. See p. 148.

- **Belfort en Lakenhalle** (**Belfry and Cloth Hall;** Ghent): At the heart of Ghent, this superb Gothic monument with a soaring bell tower dates from 1425. See p. 179.
- **Stadhuis** (**Town Hall;** Ghent): A complex mix of architectural styles defines the exterior of a civic building that was centuries in the making. Inside, in the magnificent Pacificatiezaal (Pacification Room), a treaty was signed in 1567 that aimed—unsuccessfully, as it turned out—to bring an end to religious strife in the Low Countries. See p. 182.

5 The Best Churches

- **Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule** (**Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula;** Brussels): Although more than a little plain to look at, both outside and inside, compared to the generally extravagantly decorated run of Europe's Gothic cathedrals, St-Michel's has much to commend it. A purity of line and lack of superfluous frills makes it seem like the distilled essence of a style that dominated European cityscapes for half a millennia. See p. 100.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk** (**Church of Our Lady;** Bruges): The soaring 122m (396-ft.) spire of this church can be seen from a wide area around Bruges. As a magnificent bonus, the church also holds a small but beautiful marble *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo. The only work by the great Italian artist to leave Italy during his lifetime, and one of only a few outside Italy, it occupies a place of honor. In addition, there's a painting by Anthony Van Dyck, and the 15th-century bronze tomb sculptures of Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy. See p. 147.
- **Sint-Baafskathedraal** (**St. Bavo's Cathedral;** Ghent): Notable enough in its own right, even if its combination Romanesque, Gothic, and baroque does lack a certain fluidity of form, St. Bavo's principal glory lies inside. Jan van Eyck's 24-panel altarpiece *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432), one of the most significant works in the history of art, is here for all to view, for a modest fee. See p. 180.
- **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal** (**Cathedral of Our Lady;** Antwerp): You can't easily miss this towering example of the Flemish Gothic style if you visit Antwerp, or even pass close to the city. Its 123m (400-ft.) spire dominates the area. This is in fact the biggest church in the Benelux countries, with seven naves and 125 pillars. But oversize statistics are not Our Lady's only attraction—there are no fewer than three Rubens masterpieces inside, as well as paintings by other prominent artists. See p. 200.

6 The Best Hotels

- **Métropole** (Brussels; ✆ **02/217-23-00**): This century-old hotel in the heart of Brussels maintains the Belle Epoque splendor of its first days and combines it with modern furnishings and service. Its L'Alban Chambon restaurant is one of Brussels's best. See p. 61.

- **Welcome** (Brussels; ✆ **02/219-95-46**): This is the best little hotel in Brussels. With only 17 rooms, it's small, but the welcome's a big one, and the standard of the rooms is high. Try to get Michel to tell you about his hotel's history, preferably over a glass or two of Kwak beer—but be careful: It's a long story and Kwak is strong beer. See p. 66.
- **Egmond** (Bruges; ✆ **050/34-14-45**): You can think of the Egmond as your own country mansion, for not much more than a hundred bucks a room. There's just one problem with this image: The Egmond is not actually in the country. In compensation, it has its own grounds and gardens, and is next to the Minnewater (Lover's Lake) and the Begijnhof. See p. 135.
- **Oud-Huis Amsterdam** (Bruges; ✆ **050/34-18-10**): If all the virtues and character of the splendidly preserved, gloriously medieval city of Bruges could be encapsulated in a single hotel, this would be the one. You won't find a better welcome anywhere than in this polished gem of a place. See p. 136.

7 The Best Restaurants

- **Comme Chez Soi** (Brussels; ✆ **02/512-29-21**): If Michelin were to introduce a four-star category, Comme Chez Soi would undoubtedly be one of the first to collect the extra star. The irony about this culinary holy-of-holies is its name: "Just Like Home." I definitely don't eat like this in my home, but perhaps this is standard fare at owner and master chef Pierre Wynants's place. A hallowed silence descends on diners as they sample their first mouthful of his French specialties with added Belgian zest. This being Belgium, the silence doesn't last long, but the taste and the memory linger. See p. 74.
- **In 't Spinnekopke** (Brussels; ✆ **02/511-86-95**): For a different kind of Brussels dining experience, try this down-home restaurant dating from 1762. Here, traditional Belgian dishes are given the care and attention expected of more refined—though not necessarily more tasty—cuisine. See p. 82.
- **'t Kelderke** (Brussels; ✆ **02/513-73-44**): Although it's just about hidden from human ken, this traditional restaurant turns out to occupy a position that easily could be considered the best in town. It's in a downstairs brick-arched cellar on the Grand-Place. Convivial and cozy, it makes few concessions to this ultimate tourist location, but serves up fine Belgian fare and sticks firmly to its Bruxellois roots. See p. 78.
- **La Quincaillerie** (Brussels; ✆ **02/533-98-33**): Should there be a criticism to make here—and it's far from being an onerous one—this fine restaurant in a beautifully converted hardware store is maybe just a little too taken by its own good looks and fancy attitude, and doesn't neglect to include a consideration for these on the tab. That said, it still seems like value for money, because the food is ace and the setting memorable. See p. 79.
- **Kasteel Minnewater** (Bruges; ✆ **050/33-42-54**): An enviable location on Bruges's romantic "Lake of Love" is by no means the sole attribute of this château-restaurant. It achieves the worthy

feat of living up to its looks and retaining a touch of class, while keeping its prices well within the range you might expect in such a setting. See p. 140.

- **Brasserie Pakhuis** (Ghent; ✆ **09/223-55-55**): A steady stream of locals in the know make their way to this stylish brasserie-restaurant, in a handsomely converted warehouse tucked almost out of sight down an unprepossessing side street (Pakhuis means "warehouse" in Dutch). Once inside, you'll appreciate why. Pakhuis hasn't merely got style, but content too, in a range of Continental dishes backed up by some old-time Flemish favorites. See p. 178.
- **Sir Anthony Van Dijck** (Antwerp; ✆ **03/231-61-70**): You can't go far wrong in a place whose owner/chef once voluntarily turned in his Michelin star and decided to do what he, rather than a bunch of Paris-based restaurant inspectors, liked best. The result on the plate is invariably delightful, as is a location in an atmospheric 16th-century courtyard in the city center. See p. 198.

8 The Best Buys

- **Lace:** There are two kinds of Belgian lace: exquisite handmade pieces and machine-made stuff. Machine-made lace is not necessarily bad—indeed some of it is very good—but this is the form used to mass produce pieces of indifferent quality to meet the demand for souvenirs. The highest-quality lace is handmade. Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent are the main, but far from the only, points of sale. See chapters 4 and 5.
- **Pralines:** The Swiss might argue the point, but the plain truth is that Belgian handmade chocolates, filled with various fresh-cream flavors, are the finest in the universe. Those devilish little creations—handmade Belgian pralines—are so addictive they should be sold with a government health warning attached. You can't go wrong if you buy chocolates made by Wittamer, Nihoul, Leonidas, or Neuhaus, available from specialist stores around Belgium. See chapter 4.
- **Diamonds:** One thing is for sure, you'll be spoiled for choice in Antwerp's Diamond Quarter, which does six times as much diamond business as Amsterdam. Much of the trade here is carried on by the city's Orthodox Jewish community, whose conservative ways and traditional black clothing make a striking contrast to the glitter of their stock-in-trade. See p. 203.

9 The Best Shopping

- **Shop for Antiques in place du Grand-Sablon** (Brussels): You'll need luck to score a bargain at this weekend antiques market—the dealers are well aware of the precise worth of each item in their stock and are calmly determined to get it. But it's still fun to wander the market, browsing and haggling, and who knows? You just might stumble on that hard-to-find affordable treasure. See p. 95.
- **Snap Up a Bargain at the Flea Market** (Brussels): Each day from 7am to 2pm, the Marché-aux-Puces in place du Jeu-de-Balle offers everything from the weird to the wonderful at rock-bottom prices. See p. 113.

10 The Best Cafes & Bars

- **Le Falstaff** (Brussels): This cafe deserves the highest accolades for its eclectic, accomplished mix of Art Nouveau and Art Deco and its extensive drink list. This is self-satisfied, bourgeois Brussels at its best, even if its cachet has slipped a shade since the establishment's bankruptcy a few years back. Try out a typical Brussels brew, such as gueuze. See p. 121.
- **A la Mort Subite** (Brussels): "Sudden Death" is its name, but most customers at this great traditional Brussels bar seem more intent on experiencing life than on dicing with death. The range of beers sold here is large and the commitment to old-time values is strong. See p. 120.
- **'t Dreupelkot** (Ghent): Ghent has no shortage of fine cafes, and you can just about guarantee that any one you enter will provide pleasant memories. 't Dreupelkot adds a particularly warm glow of appreciation, however; its stock-in-trade is *jenever,* one of the most potent alcoholic liquids known to humankind. Actually, some of the 100 varieties are fairly mild, while others have been flavored with herbs and spices. The atmosphere in the cafe is great—it's filled with cultured *jenever* buffs rather than with drunks. See p. 188.
- **De Engel** (Antwerp): There are cafes in town with a lot more action, but for a genuine Antwerp brown-cafe-style bar, it's hard to beat De Engel (The Angel). Its location on a corner of the Grote Markt adds to the attraction, but to experience De Engel's crowning glory, order a glass of Antwerp's own, lovingly poured De Koninck beer—a golden-brown liquid in a glass called a *bolleke* (little ball) that glows like amber in the sunlight streaming through De Engel's windows. See p. 207.

2

Planning Your Trip to Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp

While Belgium is not a difficult country to come to grips with thanks to its widespread use of English, relatively small size, and excellent tourist infrastructure, a little forethought can still save you precious time and effort. This chapter gives you the practical information you need to plan your trip.

1 The Cities in Brief

You can subdivide Belgium—as if it wasn't divided enough already—and focus in on its semiautonomous, Dutch-speaking region of Flanders, a name that has a great commercial and artistic resonance down the corridors of European history. Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp are all Flemish to the core. Brussels is something of an anomaly, an originally Flemish city that over the centuries developed a French-speaking majority, while retaining a substantial Dutch-speaking minority. It is, as well, the capital of Flanders (as well as of Belgium and, unofficially, of Europe), and lies within the borders of Flemish Brabant province, but is a separate region in its own right (Brussels-Capital)—Belgium is complicated!

BRUSSELS In a sense, Brussels, approximately in the middle of the old province of Brabant—which has been divided into a Flemish and a Walloon province—has a split personality. One is this brash new "capital of Europe," increasingly aware of its power and carrying a padded expense account in its elegant leather pocketbook. The other is the old Belgian city—once a seat of emperors, but lately more than a little provincial, tenaciously hanging on to its heritage against the wave of Euro-construction that has swept over it.

These two cities intersect, of course, generally in a popular bar or restaurant, though they may sit together uneasily. Most foreigners who live here long enough, or stay on an extended vacation, find they need to choose between the two. As an outsider, it's easy enough to live in the Eurocity. Getting below the surface to the real Brussels is more difficult, but worth the effort. Should you be tempted to compare Washington, D.C., and what we might, entirely unofficially, call "Brussels, D.E. (District of Europa)," remember President Kennedy's remark about the U.S. capital being a city of Southern efficiency and Northern charm, and see how far the same applies to Brussels.

BRUGES From its 13th-century origins as a cloth-manufacturing town to its current incarnation as a tourism mecca, the main town of West Flanders province seems to have changed little. As in a fairy tale, swans glide down the winding canals and the stone houses look as if they're made of gingerbread. Even though glass-fronted stores have taken over the ground floors of ancient buildings and

the swans scatter before tour boats chugging along the canals, Bruges has made the transition from medieval to modern with remarkable grace. The town seems revitalized rather than crushed by the tremendous influx of tourists.

GHENT The old city and capital of East Flanders province, at the confluence of the Scheldt and Leie rivers, has been spruced up, and Ghent has never looked so good. Although this former seat of the powerful counts of Flanders is larger and more citified than Bruges, it has enough cobblestone streets, meandering canals, and antique Flemish architecture to make it nearly as magical as its more famous sister. Ghent fought one ruler after another, with mixed results, always holding on to a fierce sense of the working man's independence, a sensibility that has brought it into modern-day industrial importance in a setting that quite happily blends reminders of the past with commercial requirements of today.

ANTWERP This is a port city, with all the liveliness, sophistication, and occasional seediness that you would expect from the world's fifth-largest port. The capital of Antwerp province is also the acknowledged "Diamond Center of the World," the leading market for cut diamonds and second only to London as an outlet for raw and industrial diamonds. Given that the city boasts a magnificent cathedral, a fine-arts museum full of Flemish masterpieces, a maze of medieval streets in the town center, and a vibrant cultural life, it's amazing that Antwerp has been relatively neglected by international visitors.

2 Visitor Information

The Belgian Tourist Office, the official tourist agency for Belgium, maintains overseas branches that provide excellent in-depth information on a vast array of subjects, including special interests (www.visitbelgium.com).

IN THE U.S. 780 Third Ave., Suite 1501, New York, NY 10017 (✆ **212/758-8130;** fax 212/355-7675).

IN CANADA P.O. Box 760, Succursal N.D.G., Montreal, Quebec H4A 3S2 (✆ **514/457-2888;** fax 514/489-8965).

IN THE U.K. For Brussels and Dutch-speaking Flanders: 31 Pepper St., London E14 9RW (brochure line ✆ **0800/954-5245,** or operator 0906/3020245; fax 020/7458-0045; www.visitflanders.co.uk).

IN BELGIUM Contact the national tourist office in Brussels (see "Visitor Information" in chapter 3). You'll find city and local tourist office addresses in the "Visitor Information" sections in chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7.

WEBSITES

A good starting point for exploring Brussels and Flanders is the official tourist office sites **www.visitbelgium.com**, **www.opt.be**, **www.wallonie-tourisme.be**, and **www.visitflanders.com**. You might also want to check out the independent **Flanders Tourism** (www.toervl.be), **Belgium Travel Network** (www.trabel.com), and **Brussels Travel Network** (www.trabel.com/brussels.htm).

3 Entry Requirements & Customs

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of the U.S., Canada, U.K., Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand need only a valid passport for a visit of less than 3 months to Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. If you are a

Destination Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp: Red Alert Checklist

- If you purchased traveler's checks, have you recorded the check numbers, and stored the documentation separately from the checks?
- Did you pack your camera and an extra set of camera batteries, and purchase enough film or memory disks for your digital camera? All of these items are easily available in Belgium—but they might cost more than at home.
- Do you have a safe, accessible place to store money?
- Did you bring your ID cards that could entitle you to discounts, such as AAA and AARP cards, student IDs, and the like?
- Did you bring emergency drug prescriptions and extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses?
- Do you have your credit card personal identification numbers (PINs)? Is there a daily withdrawal limit on credit card cash advances?
- Have you booked your tickets yet for opera at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels and for classical music at the Concertgebouw in Bruges (see "The Performing Arts" in chapters 4 and 5)?
- Did you pack that umbrella? You might not need it, but you likely will.

citizen of another country, be sure to check the travel regulations before you leave. No health and vaccination certificates are required, and drivers need only produce a valid driver's license from their home country.

For information on how to get a passport, go to "Passports" in the "Fast Facts" section of this chapter—the websites listed provide downloadable passport applications as well as the current fees for processing passport applications. For an up-to-date country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go to the "Travel and Living Abroad" Web page of the U.S. State Department at **http://travel.state.gov**.

CUSTOMS

Duty-free shopping has been abolished in all European Union countries, so standard allowances do not apply to goods bought in one E.U. country and brought into another. In this case, there are no import limitations for most goods, but the following guideline limits may apply: 800 cigarettes, 400 cigarillos, 200 cigars, 1 kilogram of tobacco; 10 liters of liquor, 20 liters of aperitifs (port and so on), 90 liters of wine of which 60 liters may be sparkling wine, 110 liters of beer.

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO BELGIUM

Travelers 17 and older residing in a country outside the E.U. can bring in free of duty 200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250 grams of tobacco, 1 liter of liquor or 2 liters of wine, and 50 milliliters of perfume. Import of most other goods is unlimited, as long as import duty is paid—the duty must not exceed a value of 100€. Forbidden products include firearms, counterfeit goods, banned narcotic substances, and protected animals and plants and products made from these. For further information, contact **Belgian Customs** (✆ **02/753-48-50,** or 32-2/753-48-50 from outside Belgium).

Tips Passport Savvy

Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee. When traveling, safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt and keep a copy of the critical pages with your passport number in a separate place. For traveling with children, see "Family Travel" under "Specialized Travel Resources" below.

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM BELGIUM

Returning **U.S. citizens** who have been away for at least 48 hours are allowed to bring back, once every 30 days, $800 worth of merchandise duty-free. You'll be charged a flat rate of duty on the next $1,000 worth of purchases. Any dollar amount beyond that is dutiable at whatever rates apply. On mailed gifts the duty-free limit is $200. Be sure to have your receipts or purchases handy to expedite the declaration process.

To avoid having to pay duty on foreign-made personal items you owned before you left on your trip, bring along a bill of sale, insurance policy, jeweler's appraisal, or receipts of purchase. Or you can register items that can be readily identified by a permanently affixed serial number or marking—think laptop computers, cameras, and CD players—with Customs before you leave. Take the items to the nearest Customs office or register them with Customs at the airport from which you're departing. You'll receive, at no cost, a Certificate of Registration, which allows duty-free entry for the life of the item.

For specifics, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at **www.cbp.gov**. (Click on "Travel," and then click on "Know Before You Go! Online Brochure") Or contact **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP),** 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (✆ **877/287-8667**), and request the pamphlet.

For a summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare,* issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cra-arc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C$750 exemption once a year and only after an absence of 7 days, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, one can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail unsolicited gifts to Canada valued at less than C$60 a day, provided they don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under $60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as expensive foreign cameras.

In essence, there is no limit on what **U.K.** citizens can bring back from another E.U. country like Belgium, as long as the items are for personal use (this includes gifts), and you have already paid the necessary duty and tax. However, the law sets out guidance levels. If you bring in more than these, you may be asked to prove that the goods are for your own use: 3,200 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 400 cigarillos, 3 kilograms of smoking tobacco, 10 liters of spirits, 90 liters of wine, 20

liters of fortified wine (such as port or sherry), and 110 liters of beer. For more information, contact HM Customs & Excise at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (from outside the U.K., or 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

The duty-free allowance in **Australia** is A$400 or, for those under 18, A$200. Citizens can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125 milliliters of alcohol. If you're returning with valuables you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go.* For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ✆ **1300/363-263,** or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g), plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. Fill out a certificate, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4.* For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs,** The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

4 Money

Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp (Brussels in particular) are by no means inexpensive. Clearly, whether you agree with this statement will depend on how much you can bring to bear—or bear to bring—in the way of financial resources. If you are used to the prices in New York and London, they likely won't seem too out of whack. But opportunities for scoring genuine bargains run a thin gamut from few-and-far-between to nonexistent. In your favor, however, is that the Belgians themselves like to get value for money, and by their own lights they generally achieve this. A sound rule of thumb is that if you lodge, dine, and entertain yourself in the same places where "ordinary" Belgians do, and avoid as far as possible the tourist traps, you can limit the economic damage of a visit to these popular tourism centers.

CURRENCY

The **euro** (€) is the currency in Belgium. There are 100 euro cents to each euro. Eight euro **coins** are in circulation: .01€, .02€, .05€, .10€, .20€, .50€ (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 euro cents, respectively), 1€, and 2€. The seven euro **notes** are: 5€, 10€, 20€, 50€, 100€, 200€, and 500€. The price conversions in this book are based on an exchange rate of 1€ = US$1.25, and 1€ = £1.45. Bear in mind that exchange rates fluctuate daily. For up-to-the-minute currency conversions, go to **www.xe.com/ucc**.

Tips Small Change

When you change money, ask for some small bills or loose change. Petty cash will come in handy for tipping and public transportation. Consider keeping the change separate from your larger bills, so that it's readily accessible and you'll be less of a target for theft.

The Euro, the U.S. Dollar & the British Pound

For American Readers At this writing, $1.25 was approximately 1€ (or .8€ = $1), and this was the rate of exchange used to calculate the dollar values in the table below.

For British Readers At this writing, £1 was approximately 1.45€ (or 1€ = 69p), and this was the rate of exchange used to calculate the pound values in the table below.

Note: Exchange rates fluctuate from time to time and may not be the same when you travel to Belgium. You can check current exchange rates on the Internet at **x-rates.com**.

Euro€	US$	UK£	Euro€	US$	UK£
1.00	1.25	0.69	10.00	12.50	6.90
2.00	2.50	1.38	20.00	25.00	13.80
3.00	3.75	2.07	30.00	37.50	20.70
4.00	5.00	2.76	40.00	50.00	27.60
5.00	6.25	3.45	50.00	62.50	34.50
6.00	7.50	4.14	75.00	93.75	51.70
7.00	8.75	4.83	100.00	125.00	68.95
8.00	10.00	5.52	125.00	156.25	86.20
9.00	11.25	6.21	150.00	187.50	103.45

The euro is based on the decimal system, but Belgium uses the continental numbering system in which a comma replaces the decimal point. Consequently, you will not see prices written in the familiar format of 1.95, 3.50, 5.00, and so on, but as 1,95; 3,50; 5,00; and so on. The continental numbering system also places a point where we would place a comma, so that bigger numbers will be seen as 1.250,55; 2.327,95; and so on; instead of as 1,250.55; 2,327.95; and so on. Just remember to reverse the system you're used to: comma in place of point; point in place of comma.

It's a good idea to exchange some money—enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home, so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs.

For more details on **currency exchange,** see Fast Facts boxes in chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7.

ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine). The **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) before you leave home and be sure to find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. Many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions. On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee.

You can also get cash advances on your credit card at an ATM. Credit card companies try to protect

Tips Dear Visa: I'm Off to Bruxelles!

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip abroad so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in a foreign destination and block your charges.

themselves from theft by limiting the funds someone can withdraw outside their home country, so call your credit card company before you leave home. You'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time.

Cash machines are widespread in Belgian cities and towns, and you even find them in villages (but not in all villages). Most are called "Bancontact" or "Mister Cash" and are identified by a logo with one or both of these names. They accept bank cards and credit cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks. There are a few ATMs at Brussels National Airport, and using them is a way to avoid the bad deals from the airport's currency-exchange booths.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money: They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN. If you've forgotten yours, or didn't even know you had one, call the number on the back of your credit card and ask the bank to send it to you. It usually takes 5 to 7 business days, though some banks will provide the number over the phone if you tell them your mother's maiden name or some other personal information. Keep in mind that when you use your credit card abroad, most banks assess a 2% fee above the 1% fee charged by Visa or MasterCard or American Express for currency conversion on credit charges. But credit cards still may be the smart way to go when you factor in things like exorbitant ATM fees and higher traveler's check exchange rates (and service fees).

For tips and telephone numbers to call if your wallet is stolen or lost, go to "Lost & Found" in the "Fast Facts" section, later in this chapter.

Visa and **MasterCard** (also known as **EuroCard** in Europe) are the most widely used cards in Belgium. These are almost universally accepted by hotels, restaurants, shops, and gas stations, and for travel by plane, train, and even by taxi (but not all taxi drivers accept them). **American Express** is often accepted, mostly in the middle- and upper-bracket category. **Diners Club** is not as commonly accepted as American Express. The smaller the business, the less likely it is to accept credit cards.

5 When to Go

"In season" in Belgium means mid-April to mid-October. The peak of the tourist season is July and August, when the weather is at its finest. If you're one of the growing numbers who favor shoulder- or off-season travel, you'll find Belgium every bit as attractive during those months. Not

Tips Quick ID

Tie a colorful ribbon or piece of yarn around your luggage handle, or slap a distinctive sticker on the side of your bag. This makes it less likely that someone will mistakenly appropriate it. And if your luggage gets lost, it will be easier to find.

only are airlines, hotels, and restaurants cheaper and less crowded during this time (with more relaxed service, which means you get more personal attention), but there are also some very appealing events going on. For example, Brussels swings into its rich music season in April.

CLIMATE

Belgium's climate is moderate, with few extremes in temperature either in summer or winter. It does, however, rain a lot, though there are more showers than downpours. (It's a good idea to pack a raincoat.) Temperatures are lowest in December and January, when they average 42°F (6°C), and highest in July and August, when they average 73°F (23°C).

You could even get to love Brussels in the springtime, when the parks are coming up flowers and the first sidewalk tables put in a tentative appearance, but the weather can be variable. July and August are the best months for soaking up some rays at a sidewalk cafe, dining at an outdoor restaurant in the evening, and for swimming and sunbathing at the seacoast. September usually has a few weeks of fine late-summer weather; and there are even sunny spells in winter, when brilliant, crisp weather alternates with clouded skies.

Some winters, though not very often, the temperature falls far enough for canals, in places like Bruges and Ghent, and lakes to freeze sufficiently and become playgrounds for ice skaters. Expect lots of gray skies in Brussels—Eurocrats from sunny Mediterranean countries confess to going stir-crazy for a sight of blue skies and sun during winter in the capital.

You're well advised to pack a fold-up umbrella at any time of year. Likewise, carry a raincoat (with a wool liner for winter). Second, pack a sweater or two (even in July) and be prepared to layer your clothing at any time of year. Don't worry: You're allowed to leave some space for T-shirts, skimpy tops, and sneakers.

HOLIDAYS

National holidays are January 1 (New Year's Day); Easter Sunday and Monday; May 1 (Labor Day); Ascension Day; Pentecost Sunday and Monday; July 21 (Independence Day); August 15 (Assumption Day); November 1 (All Saints' Day); November 11 (World War I Armistice Day); and December 25 (Christmas). In Flanders only, July 11 is Flemish Community Day, the anniversary of the Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302. In Wallonia only, September 27 is French Community Day, recalling liberation from Dutch rule in 1830.

BRUSSELS, BRUGES, GHENT & ANTWERP CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Belgium's big on festivals. You could arrive in a town or village to find that the populace has turned out, some of them in costume, to honor with all due solemnity—followed by some fun and games—the local cheese. The country has a lively and colorful Carnival tradition.

The **Festival of Flanders** is a full program of cultural events that runs throughout Flanders from September to June. In Ghent, international concerts are presented

in about 20 settings of medieval splendor. For full details before you come, contact Festival of Flanders, Kleine Gentstraat 46 (✆ **09/243-94-94**).

January

Antiques Fair, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. The top Belgian antiques dealers and selected dealers from abroad get together to show off their wares. Contact **Palais des Beaux-Arts** (✆ **02/507-84-66**). Last 10 days of January.

Brussels International Film Festival, Cinema Porte de Namur, Brussels. New international releases and Belgian films. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Late January.

February

Carnival, Aalst (between Brussels and Ghent). Three days of pre-Lenten festivities, including the Giants' Parade with the horse Bayard, onion-throwing from the roofs of the *Grote Markt,* and the parade of Vuil Jeannetten—men dressed as women. Contact **Aalst Tourist Office** (✆ **053/73-22-70**). Sunday to Shrove Tuesday.

March

Bal du Rat Mort, Ostend. This outrageous fancy-dress event takes its grisly name from a chic Paris cafe. Proceeds go to charity. Contact **Ostend Tourist Office** (✆ **059/70-11-99**). First Saturday in March.

Brussels International Fantasy Film Festival, Auditorium du Passage 44, Brussels. Screens science fiction and fantasy films. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Late March.

April

International Folklore Festival, Leuven. Traditional dancing and music are performed by colorful troupes from around the world. Contact Leuven Tourist Office (✆ **016/21-15-39**). Easter weekend.

Sablon Spring Baroque Music Festival, place du Grand-Sablon, Brussels. Open-air concerts in the square. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). April or May.

May

Floraliën Flower Show, Ghent. Contact **Ghent Tourist Office** (✆ **09/266-52-22**). Belgium's top flower show, held every 5 years. May 14 to May 24, 2005.

Queen Elisabeth Contest, Brussels. For promising young musicians, featuring a different instrument each year. Generally at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Contact **Concours Reine Elisabeth** (✆ **02/213-40-50**). Throughout May.

KunstenFESTIVALdesArts (KFDA), Brussels. Arts festival renowned across the cultural universe for its irritatingly scrunched-up name, which means—brilliantly original, this—Arts Festival, in both Dutch and French. It spotlights stage events, putting an emphasis on opera, theater, and dance, but also finds space for cinema, music concerts, and fine-arts exhibits. Various auditoriums and venues around town. Contact **KFDA** (✆ **02/219-07-07**). Throughout May.

Kattestoet (Festival of the Cats), Ypres (Ieper). During the traditional Kattestoet, velvet cats are thrown from the town Belfry. Contact **Ypres Tourist Office** (✆ **057/22-85-84**). Every third year on the second Sunday in May; next in 2006.

Heiligbloedprocessie (Procession of the Holy Blood), Bruges. The Bishop of Bruges leads a procession that carries a relic of Christ's blood through the streets, while costumed characters act out biblical scenes. Contact the **Bruges Tourist Office** (✆ **050/44-86-86**). Ascension Day (fifth Thurs after Easter).

Jazz Marathon, Brussels. Stuff yourself on jazz, all kinds, at a slew of concerts on the Grand-Place, place du Grand-Sablon, and place Sainte-Catherine, at other open-air venues around town, and in jazz clubs, cafes, and hotel bars. Contact **Jazz Marathon** (✆ **0900/00-750** or 02/456-04-75). Three days in mid-May.

June

Festival of Gregorian Chant, West Flanders province. Five days of religious choral music sung by leading international church choirs, at churches in the province. Contact ✆ **047/829-23-80** after 5pm. First week of June.

Carillon concerts at St. Rombout's tower, Mechelen. Home to Belgium's Royal Carillon School, Mechelen is one of the world's centers of this singular musical form, in which a classically trained musician employs a keyboard to play music on clusters of bells. Contact the **Mechelen Tourist Office** (✆ **015/29-76-55**). Saturday to Monday evenings, mid-June to August.

July

Entertainment, Grand-Place, Brussels. Concerts, theater, dance, exhibitions, and other forms of entertainment animate the Grand-Place. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Entire month.

Ommegang, Grand-Place, Brussels. Dramatic historic pageant and procession, representing the entry of Emperor Charles V into Brussels in 1549. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). First Tuesday and Thursday in July.

Brosella Folk and Jazz, Théâtre de Verdure, Brussels. A small-scale folk and jazz festival that takes place in the intimate verdure theater. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Mid-July.

Belgian National Day, Brussels. Marked throughout Belgium but celebrated most in Brussels, with a military procession and music at the Royal Palace. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). July 21.

Gentse Feesten, Ghent. Free street festival of music, dance, theater, puppet shows, and fun and games. Contact the **Festivities Department** (✆ **09/269-46-00;** www.gentsefeesten.be). During 10 days around July 21.

August

Planting of the Meiboom (May Tree), Grand-Place, Brussels. Despite the name, this does happen in August. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Early August in even-numbered years.

Carpet of Flowers, Grand-Place, Brussels. The historic square is carpeted with two-thirds of a million begonias arranged in a kind of tapestry. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Mid-August in even-numbered years.

Marktrock Rock Festival, Leuven. Rock and jazz in the square in front of the Town Hall. Contact **Leuven Tourist Office** (✆ **016/21-15-39**). Mid-August.

September

Liberation Parade, Brussels. The *Manneken-Pis* statue is dressed in a Welsh Guard's uniform in honor of the city's liberation in 1944. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). September 3.

October

Ghent International Film Festival, Ghent. Belgium's premier international film festival, where as many as

150 full-length movies and 100 shorts are screened. Contact the **Ghent Tourist Office** (✆ **09/266-52-32**). Mid-October.

December

Christmas Market, Grand-Place, Brussels. Includes an open-air ice-skating rink. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Throughout the month.

Nativity Scene and Christmas Tree, Grand-Place, Brussels. The crib has real animals. Contact **Brussels International Tourism** (✆ **02/513-89-40**). Throughout the month.

6 Travel Insurance

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, canceled tickets, and/or medical expenses. The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age, your health, and the type of trip you're taking.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip for an allowed reason, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print—and make sure that your airline is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy.

For more information, contact one of the following insurers: **Access America** (✆ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (✆ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (✆ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); or **Travelex Insurance Services** (✆ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE For travel overseas, most health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) do not provide coverage, and the ones that do often require you to pay for services upfront and reimburse you only after you return home. Whether your plan does or does not cover overseas treatment, be advised that hospitals in Belgium do not make you pay your bills upfront, but send the bill either to your insurance company direct or to you at home; in some circumstances you might be asked for a down payment. In any case, the process will be smoother if you can show the hospital that you have current and recognized medical insurance coverage. If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (✆ **410/453-6300;** www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (✆ **800/821-2828;** www.travelassistance.com; for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ✆ **800/777-8710**).

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage coverage is limited to approximately $9.07 per pound, up to approximately $635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, as

many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

7 Health & Safety

STAYING HEALTHY

You should encounter few health problems traveling in Belgium. The tap water is safe to drink, the milk is pasteurized, and the health services are good. If a medical emergency arises, your hotel staff can usually put you in touch with a reliable, English-speaking doctor.

GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

The state-owned health-care system in Belgium is among the world's best, even if it has begun to show signs of the strain of universal health care for all. It's easy to get over-the-counter medicines for minor ailments, and both local brands and generic equivalents of most common prescription drugs are available. Many doctors speak English (though the words they use might be a little disturbing, like the doctor who told me he knew what "disease" I had when I reported a minor ailment).

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

Most hospitals have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening; you may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit. Embassies in Brussels can provide a list of area doctors who speak English (meaning just about any doctor). We list hospitals, embassies, and emergency numbers under "Fast Facts" in each destination's chapter.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (✆ **888/633-4298;** www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert's 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses.

STAYING SAFE

Belgium is generally safe—even the big cities are low-crime areas. However, like many countries, Belgium has experienced a creeping spread of drug-related crime. In Brussels the Métro system has been plagued by muggers, and though increased police presence and video surveillance have brought this under control, it's still better not to venture into deserted Métro access corridors after dark; when other people are around, it's generally safe.

Rising levels of some crimes—muggings, break-ins, pickpocketing, bag-snatching, and auto theft—have been attributed to immigrants, legal and illegal, and ethnic minorities. Indigenous Belgian criminals are quite capable of generating trouble of their own, of course, as the homicidal pedophilia cases during the 1990s demonstrated.

Avoiding "Economy Class Syndrome"

Deep vein thrombosis, or as it's know in the world of flying, "economy class syndrome," is a blood clot that develops in a deep vein. It's a potentially deadly condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions—such as an airplane cabin—for too long. During a flight (especially a long-haul flight), get up, walk around, and stretch your legs every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. Other preventative measures include frequent flexing of the legs while sitting, drinking lots of water, and avoiding alcohol and sleeping pills. If you have a history of deep vein thrombosis, heart disease, or other condition that puts you at high risk, some experts recommend wearing compression stockings or taking anticoagulants when you fly; always ask your physician about the best course for you. Symptoms of deep vein thrombosis include leg pain or swelling, or even shortness of breath.

DEALING WITH HOSTILITY & DISCRIMINATION

U.S. visitors might—and I emphasize only might—encounter some hostility, due primarily to current (late 2004) circumstances in Iraq and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Among other local pet beefs could be the U.S.'s refusal to sign up to both the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and its "support" for gene-modified ("Frankenstein") foods and the death penalty. (Some Europeans aren't all that keen on apple pie either.) Some native Belgians and some of the country's significant Muslim population might want to take issue with you on one or more of these topics, in ways ranging from open discussion to surly service, the cold shoulder, or even verbal aggression. I know of no cases of physical aggression and would guess this to be exceedingly rare or nonexistent.

Flemish Belgians are showing an increasing propensity to vote for the extreme right-wing (some commentators say neo-fascist) Flemish nationalist Vlaams Blok political party, which is opposed to allowing more economic migrants and political refugees into Belgium, and even to the continued presence of ethnic minority communities. They get 25% of the vote across the region and more than a third in Antwerp. Rising levels of some crimes attributed to immigrants, legal and illegal, and ethnic minorities appear to be fueling this trend. This attitude could easily translate into discrimination against nonwhite visitors—but note that the overwhelming majority of Belgians would be appalled by this.

Antwerp has both an Orthodox Jewish minority and a significant minority of North African (Arab) origin. Tensions caused by the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have led to a spate of anti-Semitic attacks. Jewish visitors who dress in a way that clearly identifies them as Jewish should be aware of this, even though the chances of being a victim of such an attack are very small. In neighborhoods with a big proportion of North African immigrants, radical Arab youths have staged vigilante patrols, but these are directed more at imaginary enemies, and at an occasional real one in the shape of right-wing, white racist thugs, than against members of the Jewish community (who in any case have other things to do with their time than to go wandering around these neighborhoods).

Note: Listing some of the possible dangers together like this can give a false impression of the threat from crime or discrimination in Flanders. None of these dangers is statistically significant, and by no stretch of the imagination can any Belgian city be described as dangerous. The overwhelming probability is that you will not notice any of these problems, far less encounter one of them. But it can't hurt to be aware of them.

8 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before.

Many hotels and restaurants now provide easy access for travelers with disabilities, and some display the international wheelchair symbol in their brochures and advertising. It's always a good idea to call ahead to find out just what the situation is before you book. Brussels National Airport has a service to help travelers with disabilities through the airport. There's also comprehensive assistance for travelers with disabilities throughout Belgian Railways. Inquire also at the national tourist office for specific details on the available resources.

Not all trams in Brussels and Antwerp are easily accessible for wheelchairs, but the new trams being introduced on some routes have low central doors that are accessible. The Métro systems are fully accessible. Taxis are also difficult, but new minivan taxis are an improvement.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (✆ **507/451-5005;** www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Access-Able Travel Source** (✆ **303/232-2979;** www.access-able.com) offers extensive access information and advice for traveling around the world with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys** (✆ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include **MossRehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality) (✆ **212/447-7284;** www.sath.org; annual membership fees: $45 adults, $30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)** (✆ **800/232-5463;** www.afb.org).

For more information specifically targeted to travelers with disabilities, the community website **iCan** (www.icanonline.net/channels/travel/index.cfm) has destination guides and several regular columns on accessible travel. Also check out the quarterly magazine ***Emerging Horizons*** ($14.95 per year, $19.95 outside the U.S.; www.emerginghorizons.com) and ***Open World*** magazine, published by SATH (see above; subscription: $13 per year, $21 outside the U.S.).

The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Rd., London EC1V 8AF (✆ **020/7250-3222**), publishes three holiday "fact packs" for £2 each or £5 for all three.

The first one provides general information, including planning and booking a holiday, insurance, and finances; the second outlines transportation available when going abroad and equipment for rent; the third covers specialized accommodations.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) (✆ **800/448-8550** or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (✆ **800/397-2681;** www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Now, Voyager** (✆ **800/255-6951;** www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco–based gay-owned and -operated travel service.

The following travel guides are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores, or you can order them from **Giovanni's Room** bookstore, 1145 Pine St., Philadelphia, PA 19107 (✆ **215/923-2960;** www.giovannisroom.com): ***Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe*** (www.frommers.com), an excellent travel resource; ***Out and About*** (✆ **800/929-2268;** www.outandabout.com), which offers guidebooks and a newsletter ($20 per year; 10 issues) packed with solid information on the global gay and lesbian scene; ***Spartacus International Gay Guide*** (Bruno Gmünder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and ***Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner*** (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.), both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; the ***Damron*** guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians; and ***Gay Travel A to Z: The World of Gay & Lesbian Travel Options at Your Fingertips,*** by Marianne Ferrari (Ferrari International; Box 35575, Phoenix, AZ 85069), a very good gay and lesbian guidebook series.

In Belgium contact **Infor Homo,** avenue de l'Opale 101, 1030 Brussels (✆ **02/733-10-24**).

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. In Belgium, people over the age of 60 may qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions (but some of these places offer these reductions only to local citizens, or residents, upon presentation of an appropriate ID), as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (✆ **888/687-2277;** www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (✆ **877/426-8056;** www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those ages 55 or over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Most courses last 5 to 7 days in the U.S. (2–4 weeks abroad), and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include: the quarterly magazine ***Travel 50 & Beyond*** (www.travel50andbeyond.com); ***Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the***

Mature Traveler (Avalon); ***101 Tips for Mature Travelers,*** available from Grand Circle Travel (✆ **800/221-2610** or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); and ***Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50*** (McGraw-Hill).

FAMILY TRAVEL

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes.

To locate those accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the "Kids" icon throughout this guide. In Belgian cities, small towns, and villages, the colorful pageantry of past centuries as depicted in numerous festivals will surely delight the younger set. Brussels's *Manneken-Pis* statue, a famous national monument of a little boy urinating, is usually a winner. Virtually every sightseeing attraction admits children at half price, and many offer family ticket discounts.

Arrange ahead of time for such necessities as a crib, bottle warmer, and car seat (small children are not allowed to ride in the front seat). For information on babysitters, see "Fast Facts: Brussels," in chapter 3.

Familyhostel (✆ **800/733-9753;** www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced domestic and international learning vacations. Lectures, fields trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

Recommended family travel Internet sites include **Family Travel Forum** (www.familytravelforum.com), a comprehensive site that offers customized trip planning; **Family Travel Network** (www.familytravelnetwork.com), an award-winning site that offers travel features, deals, and tips; **Traveling Internationally with Your Kids** (www.travelwithyourkids.com), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com), which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Check out the website **Journeywoman** (www.journeywoman.com), a "real life" women's travel information network where you can sign up for a free e-mail newsletter and get advice on everything from etiquette and dress to safety; or the travel guide ***Safety and Security for Women Who Travel,*** by Sheila Swan and Peter Laufer (Travelers' Tales, Inc.), offering common-sense tips on safe travel. Due to its location at the frontier between Germanic northern Europe and the Latin south, Belgium has its share of men who think themselves exemplars of Latin, or at least Gallic charm, and quite the ladies' men. But this attitude is minimized by a certain north-European correctness. Since most of the territory covered by this book is in the Flemish north of Belgium, correctness is more likely to be the rule. In short, as a general observation, women traveling alone or in a group should experience no difficulty in getting all the male attention they might desire, but no problem in fending it off if they don't.

STUDENT TRAVEL

Arm yourself with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC),** which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available

for $22 from **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040** in North America; www.sta.com or www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). (***Note:*** In 2002 STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It's still operating some offices under the Council name, but it's owned by STA.) **Travel CUTS** (✆ **800/667-2887** or 416/614-2887; www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadian and U.S. residents. Irish students may prefer to turn to **USIT** (✆ **01/602-1600;** www.usitnow.ie), an Ireland-based specialist in student, youth, and independent travel.

SINGLE TRAVELERS

Single travelers are often hit with a "single supplement" to the base price. To avoid it, you can agree to room with other single travelers on the trip, or you can find a compatible roommate before you go from one of the many roommate locator agencies.

Travel Buddies Singles Travel Club (✆ **800/998-9099;** www.travelbuddiesworldwide.com), based in Canada, runs small, intimate, single-friendly group trips and will match you with a roommate free of charge. **Travel-Chums** (✆ **212/787-2621;** www.travelchums.com) is an Internet-only travel-companion matching service with elements of an online personals-type site, hosted by the respected New York–based Shaw Guides travel service. **The Single Gourmet Club** (www.singlegourmet.com) is an international social, dining, and travel club for singles of all ages, with club chapters in 21 cities in the U.S. and Canada. Annual membership fees vary from city to city.

Backroads (✆ **800/462-2848;** www.backroads.com) offers more than 160 active-travel trips to 30 destinations worldwide, including Belgium.

For more information, check out Eleanor Berman's latest edition of ***Traveling Solo: Advice and Ideas for More Than 250 Great Vacations*** (The Globe Pequot Press), a guide with advice on traveling alone, whether on your own or on a group tour.

9 Planning Your Trip Online

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The "big three" online travel agencies, **Expedia.com, Travelocity,** and **Orbitz,** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try Expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go for Expedia.co.uk and opodo.co.uk.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it's wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer's authors. It's a browser add-on that purports to "search 140 sites at once," but in reality only beats competitors' fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites,** especially those for low-fare carriers such as Southwest, JetBlue, WestJet, or Ryanair. Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency's transaction fee. But you'll get these discounts only by **booking online.** For the websites of airlines that fly to and from your destination, go to "Getting There," p. 31.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. For last-minute trips, **site59.com** and **lastminutetravel.com** in the U.S. and **lastminute.com** in Europe often have better deals than the major-label sites.

If you're willing to give up some control over your flight details, use an **"opaque" fare service** like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a "mystery airline" at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire. In 2004 Priceline added non-opaque service to its roster.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of ***Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart*** (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia** offers a long list of special deals and "virtual tours" or photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for (a feature that helps counter the claims that the best rooms are often held back from bargain-booking websites). **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable are **Hotels.com** and **Quikbook.com.** An excellent free program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxe.net), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of. It's a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

Priceline and **Hotwire** are even better for hotels than for airfares, and they cover Europe; you're allowed to pick the neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering up your money, though it's much better at getting five-star lodgings for three-star

Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend **Frommers.com** (www.frommers.com), voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine.* We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, bookstore, and online booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Destinations** section, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,500 destinations around the globe; the **Frommers.com Newsletter,** with the latest deals, travel trends, and money-saving secrets; our **Community** area featuring **Message Boards,** where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); and our **Photo Center,** where you can post and share vacation tips. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

prices than at finding anything at the bottom of the scale.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

10 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Travelers have any number of ways to check their e-mail and access the Internet on the road. Of course, using your own laptop—or even a PDA (personal digital assistant) or electronic organizer with a modem—gives you the most flexibility. But even if you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail and even your office computer from cybercafes.

WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking are at **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**.

Aside from formal cybercafes, most **youth hostels** nowadays have at least one computer you can get to the Internet on. And most **public libraries** across the world offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These kiosks, which you'll also see in shopping malls, hotel lobbies, and tourist information offices around the world, give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. The kiosks' clunkiness and high price mean they should be avoided whenever possible.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view and reply to your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (http://mail.yahoo.com). (Microsoft's Hotmail is another popular option, but Hotmail has severe spam problems.) Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafe—provided your "target" PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafe computer to access the GoToMyPC system.

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Major ISPs have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local

Online Traveler's Toolbox

Veteran travelers usually carry some essential items to make their trips easier. Following is a selection of online tools to bookmark and use.

- **Foreign Languages for Travelers** (www.travlang.com). Learn basic terms in more than 70 languages and click on any underlined phrase to hear what it sounds like.
- **Intellicast** (www.intellicast.com) and **Weather.com** (www.weather.com). Give weather forecasts for cities around the world.
- **Mapquest** (www.mapquest.com). This best of the mapping sites lets you choose a specific address or destination, and in seconds it will return a map and detailed directions.
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc). See what your dollar or pound is worth in more than 100 other countries.
- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com) for locations of PLUS ATMs worldwide, or **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com) for locations of Cirrus ATMs worldwide.

call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home and how much it will cost. If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com and click on "Individuals Buy Now." One solid provider is **i2roam** (www.i2roam.com; ✆ **866/811-6209** or 920/235-0475).

USING A CELLPHONE IN BELGIUM

GSM (Global System for Mobiles) is a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. If your cellphone is on a GSM, and you have a world-capable multiband phone, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas on much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high—usually $1 to $1.50 in western Europe.

Many cellphone operators sell "locked" phones that restrict you from using any other removable computer memory phone chip (called a **SIM card**) card than the ones they supply. Having an unlocked phone allows you to install a cheap, prepaid SIM card (found at a local retailer) in your destination country. You'll get a local phone number—and much lower calling rates.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. Phone rental isn't cheap. You'll usually pay $40 to $50 per week, plus airtime fees of at least a dollar a minute. If you're traveling to Europe, though, local rental companies often offer free incoming calls within their home country, which can save you big bucks.

For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked prepaid phone

systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than $100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

11 Getting There

BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport, at Zaventem, 15km (9 miles) northeast of the city center, has a direct rail connection to Brussels, and from there to Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and other Belgian cities. See "Orientation" in chapter 3.

FROM THE U.S. & CANADA Carriers with frequent flights to Brussels from cities that include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Toronto are **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262;** www.aircanada.ca), **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300;** www.aa.com), **Delta** (✆ **800/221-1212;** www.delta.com), and **United Airlines** (✆ **800/538-2929;** www.united.com).

FROM THE U.K. **British Airways** (✆ 0870/850-9850; www.britishairways.com), **SN Brussels Airlines** (✆ 020/7559-9787; www.flysn.com), **Virgin Express** (✆ 0870/730-1134; www.virgin-express.com), and **BMi** (✆ 0870/607-0555; www.flybmi.com) fly to Brussels from cities that include Edinburgh, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds/Bradford, London, Manchester, and Sheffield. **Ryanair** (✆ 0871/246-0000; www.ryanair.com) flies from London and Glasgow to Charleroi. **VLM Airlines** has daily flights from London City, Manchester, and Liverpool airports in the U.K. to Brussels and Antwerp.

FROM IRELAND **Aer Lingus** (✆ **01/886-8888;** www.aerlingus.com) and **SN Brussels Airlines** (in Britain ✆ 020/7559-9787; www.flysn.com) fly from Dublin to Brussels. **Ryanair** (✆ **01/609-7881;** www.ryanair.com) flies from Dublin to Charleroi.

FROM AUSTRALIA **KLM** (✆ **130/030-3747;** www.klm.com) and **Qantas** (✆ **131313;** www.qantas.com.au) fly from Sydney to Amsterdam, where you can transfer for Brussels.

FROM NEW ZEALAND **Air New Zealand** (✆ **0800/737000;** www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to London, where you can transfer for Brussels.

GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1 hour** before a domestic flight and **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and she'll probably whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport. (Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for domestic flights, but they do for flights to the Netherlands.)

Security checkpoint lines are getting shorter, but if you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles, and by having a note from your doctor if you've got metallic body parts.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't.**

The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov/public/index.jsp) for details.

Airport screeners may decide that your checked luggage needs to be searched by hand. You can now purchase luggage locks that allow screeners to open and relock a checked bag if hand-searching is necessary.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

Passengers sharing the same airplane cabin rarely pay the same fare. Travelers who need to purchase tickets at the last minute, change their itinerary at a moment's notice, or fly one-way often get stuck paying the premium rate. Here are some ways to keep your airfare costs down:

- Passengers who can book their ticket **long in advance,** who can **stay over Saturday night,** or who **fly midweek** or **at less-trafficked hours** may pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.
- You can also save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars,** when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see "Planning Your Trip Online" earlier in this chapter).
- Try to book a ticket **in its country of origin.** For instance, if you're planning a one-way flight from Johannesburg to Bombay, a South Africa–based travel agent will probably have the lowest fares. For multileg trips, book in the country of the first leg; for example, book New York–London–Amsterdam–Rome–New York in the U.S.
- **Consolidators,** also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times,* and *Miami Herald.* Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines. Several reliable consolidators are worldwide and available on the Net. **STA Travel** is now the world's leader in student travel, thanks to their purchase of Council Travel. It also offers good fares for travelers of all ages. **ELTExpress (Flights.com)** (✆ **800/TRAV-800;** www.eltexpress.com) started in Europe and has excellent fares worldwide, but particularly to that continent. It also has "local" websites in 12 countries. **Air Tickets Direct** (✆ **800/778-3447;** www.airticketsdirect.com) is based in Montreal and leverages the currently weak Canadian dollar for low fares.
- Join **frequent-flier clubs.** Accrue enough miles and you'll be rewarded with free flights and elite

status. It's free, and you'll get the best choice of seats, faster response to phone inquiries, and prompter service if your luggage is stolen, your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don't need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.

- For many more tips about air travel, including a rundown of the major frequent-flier credit cards, pick up a copy of ***Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart*** (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS: HOW TO STAY COMFORTABLE

Long flights can be trying; stuffy air and cramped seats can make you feel as if you're being sent parcel post in a small box. But with a little advance planning, you can make an otherwise unpleasant experience almost bearable.

- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your leg room. Find more details at www.seatguru.com, which has extensive details about almost every seat on six major U.S. airlines. For international airlines, research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches at www.airlinequality.com.
- Emergency exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency exit seats are usually held back to be assigned the day of a flight (to ensure that the seat is filled by someone able-bodied); it's worth getting to the ticket counter early to snag one of these spots for a long flight. Many passengers find that bulkhead seating (the row facing the wall at the front of the cabin) offers more legroom, but keep in mind that bulkheads are where airlines often put baby bassinets, so you may be sitting next to an infant.
- To have two seats for yourself in a three-seat row, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you're traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you'll end up with three seats to yourselves. And in the event that a third passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be more than happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- Ask about entertainment options. Many airlines offer seatback video systems where you get to choose your movies or play video games—but only on some of their planes. (Boeing 777s are your best bet.)
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or a row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

Airlines go bankrupt, so protect yourself by **buying your tickets with a credit card,** as the Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy). **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against "carrier default" for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust midtrip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than $25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

Tips Coping with Jet Lag

Jet lag is a pitfall of traveling across time zones. If you're flying north-south and you feel sluggish when you touch down, your symptoms will be caused by dehydration and the general stress of air travel. When you travel east to west or vice-versa, however, your body becomes thoroughly confused about what time it is, and everything from your digestion to your brain gets knocked for a loop. Traveling east, say, from Chicago to Paris, is more difficult on your internal clock than traveling west, say from Atlanta to Hawaii, as most peoples' bodies find it more acceptable to stay up late than to fall asleep early.

Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- **Reset your watch** to your destination time before you board the plane.
- **Drink lots of water** before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
- **Exercise and sleep well** for a few days before your trip.
- If you have trouble sleeping on planes, **fly eastward on morning flights.**
- **Daylight** is the key to resetting your body clock. At the website for **Outside In** (www.bodyclock.com), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light.

areas. Avoid seats in the back of many jets—these can be more narrow than those in the rest of coach class. You also may want to reserve a window seat so that you can rest your head and avoid being bumped in the aisle.

- Get up, walk around, and stretch every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. This helps avoid **deep vein thrombosis,** or "economy-class syndrome," a potentially deadly condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions for too long. Other preventative measures include drinking lots of water and avoiding alcohol.
- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack of humidity in airplane cabins—which can be drier than the Sahara. Bring a bottle of water onboard. Avoid alcohol, which will dehydrate you.
- If you're flying with kids, don't forget to carry on toys, books, pacifiers, and chewing gum to help them relieve ear pressure buildup during ascent and descent. Let each child pack his or her own backpack with favorite toys.

GETTING THERE BY BOAT

P&O Ferries (✆ **08705/202020** Britain, or 02/710-64-44 Belgium; www.poferries.com) has daily car-ferry service between Hull in northeast England and Zebrugge. The overnight trip time is 12½ hours.

Superfast Ferries (✆ **0870/234-0870** Britain, or 050/25-22-92 Belgium; www.superfast.com) has daily car-ferry service between Rosyth, across the Forth River from Edinburgh, Scotland, to Zeebrugge. The overnight trip time is 17½ hours.

At Zeebrugge a bus shuttles between the harbor and the rail station, and there's hourly train service from there to Brussels, via Bruges and Ghent.

GETTING THERE BY TRAIN

Rail service to Belgium from major European cities is frequent, fast, and generally inexpensive compared to air travel.

Britain is connected to the Continent (or as the Brits might say, the Continent is connected to Britain)

through the Channel Tunnel. On the **Eurostar** high-speed train, with a top speed of 300kmph (186 mph), travel times between London Waterloo Station and Brussels Midi Station are 2 hours 40 minutes. Departures are approximately every 2 hours. For Eurostar reservations, call ✆ **08701/606600** in Britain, or 02/528-28-28 in Belgium. Or book online at **www.eurostar.com**. Tickets also are available from main rail stations and travel agents.

The **Thalys** high-speed train, with a top speed of 300kmph (186 mph), that connects Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Cologne, has cut travel times from Paris–Nord Station to Brussels–Midi Station to 1 hour 25 minutes. Departures are approximately every hour. For Thalys reservations in Belgium, call ✆ **02/528-28-28.** Or book online at **www.thalys.com**. Tickets also are available from main rail stations and travel agents.

GETTING THERE BY BUS

Eurolines has the most comprehensive bus network in Europe. For reservations, call ✆ **08705/808080** in Britain, or 02/274-13-50 in Belgium. Or book online at **www.eurolines.com**. Eurolines has coach service (through the Channel Tunnel) between London Victoria Bus Station and Brussels's Gare du Nord Bus Station, with up to four departures daily. Fares are from around £20 one-way. Travel time is around 8 hours.

GETTING THERE BY CAR

Belgium is crisscrossed by a network of major highways. European expressways E19, E35, E231, and E22 converge on Brussels from France to the south, the Netherlands to the north, and from Germany to the east. These roads also have Belgian designations; as you approach the city they are, respectively: A4, A2, A1, and A7. Brussels's ring road is R0. Traffic is invariably heavy but road conditions are otherwise excellent, service stations are plentiful, and highways are plainly signposted. Traffic congestion in Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp can cause monumental tie-ups—it's best to park your car at your hotel garage and use local transportation or walk (the best way, incidentally, to tour all four cities).

VIA THE CHANNEL TUNNEL FROM BRITAIN If you want to drive from Britain to Belgium, you can use the fast and efficient **Eurotunnel** (✆ **08705/353535** in Britain; www.eurotunnel.com); auto-transporter trains transport your car through the Channel Tunnel from Folkestone, England, to Calais, France (a 35-min. trip). Departures are every 15 minutes at peak times, every 30 minutes at times of average demand, and every hour at night. In late 2004 fares ranged from £120 to £190 ($190–$290) per car, depending on the day, time, and other variables. The cheapest transits are usually midweek between 2 and 5am. Reserving in advance makes sense at the busiest times, but the system is so fast, frequent, and simple that you may prefer to retain travel flexibility by just showing up, buying your ticket, waiting in line for a short while, and then driving aboard.

12 Getting Around Belgium

Belgium's compact size makes it easy on travelers. The roads are excellent (though often busy), and the comprehensive train and bus system is one of Europe's best.

BY TRAIN

All major tourist destinations in Belgium can be done easily in a day trip by train from Brussels, on the excellent rail net of the Société Nationale

des Chemins de Fer Belges/SNCB, or NMBS in Dutch (Belgian Railways; ✆ **02/528-28-28;** www.sncb.be). Antwerp is just 29 minutes away; Ghent, 32 minutes; and Bruges, 55 minutes. These times are by the fast Intercity (IC) trains; Inter-Regional (IR) trains are somewhat slower; and Local (L) trains are the tortoises of the system, stopping at every station on the way.

Tickets are sold at most stations (in the case of those that are too small to support a ticket office, you buy your ticket from the conductor onboard the train) and, in the case of Eurostar and Thalys tickets, at many travel agents. Timetables are available at all stations, and main stations have information and reservation desks.

If all or most of your travel will be by train, a good investment is a **Rail Pass,** good for 10 single journeys anywhere on the network, except for stations at international borders, for 62€ ($78). Another option is the discounted weekend return ticket, valid from noon on Friday to noon on Monday; the more people you travel with, the greater the discount per ticket. Even if you make only one or two day trips by rail, be sure to inquire about **Minitrips**—1-day excursion tickets to major sightseeing destinations at discount prices.

Main rail stations, and some minor ones, have bikes for rent.

BY BUS

Intercity bus service ranges from poor to nonexistent in Belgium. This is not as bad as it sounds, because the rail network is among the best in the world, and fast, comfortable intercity trains do all the work. If you really want to, you can travel intercity by bus, with Flanders's **De Lijn** company (**070/22-02-00;** www.delijn.be), but the buses stop a lot en route, so trip times are long, and you often have to change at an intermediate town.

All four cities have excellent bus and/or tram service and some have Métro (subway) service, which means you can easily deposit your car at the hotel and avoid city driving woes.

BY CAR

To drive in Belgium, you need a valid passport, your driver's license, and, if you're bringing your own car, a valid registration and green card proving international insurance. Driving conditions are excellent in Belgium, with lighted highways at night, roadside telephones connected to the emergency services, and "TS" (Touring Secours) yellow cars that patrol major highways to render emergency service at minimal cost. If you have car trouble, simply pull off the road, go to one of the roadside telephones, and dial ✆ **070/34-47-77,** then wait for the TS. On other roads call TS from the nearest telephone or your cellphone.

Belgian drivers, though, are not so excellent. They're notoriously fast and aggressive and have clocked up some of the worst road-accident statistics in Europe, so drive carefully.

RENTALS Rental cars are available from **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S.), bd. Maurice Lemonnier 8, Brussels (✆ **02/720-60-44**); **Avis** (✆ **800/331-2112** in the U.S.), rue de France 2, Brussels (✆ **02/527-17-05**); **Budget,** av. Louise 327B, Brussels (✆ **02/753-21-70**); and **Europcar,** chaussée de Waterloo 538, Brussels (✆ **02/348-92-12**). All four companies have desks at Brussels National Airport. Expect to pay from 60€ ($75) a day, and 200€ ($250) a week, including insurance and other charges, and for unlimited mileage.

GASOLINE Leaded Super gasoline, identified by red markings on the pump and pump handle, is around 1.10€ ($1.40) a liter (.26 gal.); lead-free Eurosuper (95 octane) and Superplus (98 octane), identified by green

Tips Finding an Address

In Dutch, the local language in Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, *-straat* means "street," *-gracht* means "canal," *-plein* or *-plaats* means "square," *-markt* means "market" or "market square," *-dijk* means "dike," and *-laan* means "avenue." All of these are used as suffixes attached directly to the name of the location or thoroughfare (for example, Green Sq. becomes Groenplaats).

markings on the pump and pump handle, are around 1.05€ ($1.30) a liter. Most gas stations, except those on main expressways, close at night, but many remain accessible to bank cards through automatic payment systems.

RULES To drive in Belgium, U.S. citizens need only a valid passport, a U.S. driver's license, and a valid auto registration. The minimum age for drivers is 18. On highways, speed limits are 70kmph (43 mph) minimum, 120kmph (74 mph) maximum; in all cities and urban areas, the maximum speed limit is 50kmph (31 mph). Lower limits might be posted. Seat belts must be worn in both the front seats and in the back.

One important driving rule is the *priorité de droite* (priority from the right), which makes it perfectly legal most of the time to pull out from a side road to the right of the flow of traffic. That means, of course, that you must keep a sharp eye on the side roads to your right (see "Road Non-Sense" in chapter 3).

ROAD MAPS Tourist offices provide excellent city, regional, and country maps. Michelin map numbers 213 and 214 cover the country; they are detailed and reliable and can be bought for about 8€ ($10) from bookstores, news vendors, some supermarkets, and other outlets.

13 Tips on Accommodations

Traditional Belgian hotels tend to be simpler than American ones and emphasize cleanliness and friendliness over amenities. For example, even in the cheapest American chain motel, free cable is as standard as indoor plumbing. In Europe few hotels below the moderate level even have in-room TVs.

Unless otherwise noted, all hotel rooms in this book have private en-suite bathrooms. However, the standard Belgian hotel bathroom might not look like what you're used to. For example, one European concept of a shower is to stick a nozzle in the bathroom wall and a drain in the floor. Shower curtains are optional. In some cramped private bathrooms, you have to relocate the toilet paper outside the bathroom before turning on the shower and drenching the whole room. Another interesting fixture is the "half tub," in which there's only room to sit, rather than lie down. Hot water may be available only once a day and not on demand—this is especially true with shared bathrooms. Heating water is costly, and many smaller hotels do it only once daily, in the morning.

Belgium conforms with the Benelux Hotel Classification System. Each establishment that accepts guests must publicly display a sign indicating its classification (from "1" for those with minimum amenities to "5" for deluxe, full-service hotels). The national tourist boards do an excellent job of providing full accommodations listings and advance booking for visitors.

No matter what end of the price scale it's on, each lodging will be spotlessly clean and will have a staff dedicated to personal attention and excellent service. The rates quoted include the service charge (usually 15%), tax, and, in most cases, breakfast.

Be sure to inquire about discounts when you book your room. Many hotels have a variety of room rates. It's sometimes possible to pay less if you settle for a shower instead of full bathroom facilities. Also, weekend or midweek rates are often available.

COMPLAINTS Belgians like to both give and receive good service in hotels (the same applies in restaurants), but there's a subtle subtext: The service providers are very far from being Maoists given to bouts of tearful self-criticism. This attitude surfaces most clearly when you make a complaint. You may be astonished to discover that if you have a problem with something, the fault might be attributed to you for not being satisfied with what's provided! When an outraged service receiver meets an offended service provider, it's a case study in what happens when an irresistible force encounters an immovable object. A furious verbal exchange is likely to ensue, with both sides giving as good as they get, and both likely to be convinced they have emerged from the fray as the clear winner.

And then there's the approach to making complaints adopted by some, shall we say, Americans. Rearing up on one's hind legs and hollering until the staff person gets his or her butt into gear goes down like the *Titanic* in Belgium. In a big international hotel, where the staff is used to the demanding "foibles" of the world's business travelers, the response is likely to be glacial but correct. But in a local hotel further down the financial food chain, watch out: You might have a stand-up fight on your hands.

SAVING ON YOUR HOTEL ROOM

The **rack rate** is the maximum rate that a hotel charges for a room. Hardly anybody pays this price, however. To lower the cost of your room:

- **Ask about special rates or other discounts.** Always ask whether a room less expensive than the first one quoted is available, or whether any special rates apply to you. You may qualify for corporate, student, military, senior, or other discounts. Mention membership in AAA, AARP, frequent-flier programs, or trade unions, which may entitle you to special deals as well. Find out the hotel policy on children—do kids stay free in the room or is there a special rate?
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, you'll often get a better deal by calling the individual hotel's reservation desk than at the chain's main number.
- **Book online.** Many hotels offer Internet-only discounts, or supply rooms to Priceline, Hotwire, or Expedia at rates much lower than the ones you can get through the hotel itself. Shop around. And if you have special needs—a quiet room, a room with a view—call the hotel directly and make your needs known after you've booked online.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Business hotels in downtown locations are busiest during the week, so you can expect big discounts over the weekend. Many hotels have high-season and low-season prices, and booking the day after "high season" ends can mean big discounts.
- **Look into group or long-stay discounts.** If you come as part of a large group, you should be able to negotiate a bargain rate, since

Tips Dial E for Easy

For quick directions on how to call Belgium, see the "Telephones" listing in the "Fast Facts" section at the end of this chapter.

the hotel can then guarantee occupancy in a number of rooms. Likewise, if you're planning a long stay (at least 5 days), you might qualify for a discount.

- **Avoid excess charges and hidden costs.** When you book a room, ask whether the hotel charges for parking. Use your own cellphone, pay phones, or prepaid phone cards instead of dialing direct from hotel phones, which usually have exorbitant rates. And don't be tempted by the room's minibar offerings: Most hotels charge through the nose for water, soda, and snacks.
- **Book an efficiency.** A room with a kitchenette allows you to shop for groceries and cook your own meals. This is a big money saver, especially for families on long stays.

14 Tips on Dining

If I were asked to give one unconditional guarantee for your visit to these four Belgian cities, it would be this: You will eat well, and you'll never be far from a good place to eat. Standards of ingredients, preparation, presentation, and service are extraordinarily high throughout Belgium—and the number and diversity of restaurants are nothing short of staggering. This is perhaps the one single area in which you get the best value for your dollar in every price range, from budget to deluxe.

To some degree, dining out takes on the aspect of entertainment. Whereas many Americans view dinner as a prelude to the evening's entertainment, for people here, dinner *is* the evening entertainment. They would no more tolerate rudeness or being rushed through their meal than they would tolerate bad food poorly prepared. And therein lies a caution—be sure you allow enough time for each meal. That impeccable service may not be indifferent, but to Americans it can sometimes seem slow. My advice is to do as the natives do and give yourself over to the occasion. Relax, enjoy your surroundings and your companions, and you may even find that the wait between courses enhances your appreciation of each new dish.

Sidewalk cafes are as numerous as pralines in a chocolatier's display case—and it's a safe bet that you will quickly become as fond of them as are the locals. What may come as a surprise is that these charming eateries lining city streets and village squares have the same high standards as the upscale restaurants.

Belgians like to drink as well as eat, and it's not hard to guess their favored beverage: in a word, beer. Beer is Belgium's national drink. Imported beers are freely available, but you won't want to miss sampling at least a few of the local brews, more than 450 of which are produced in Belgium alone. Wine lovers will find the best vintages from France widely available. Belgian *jenever,* a deceptively smooth, mild-tasting gin, rivals beer in the affections of the Belgians.

DINING HOURS Most restaurants are open from noon to 2:30pm for lunch and from 6 or 7 to 11pm or

midnight. Even if a restaurant is open until around this time, you won't get served unless you arrive well before then—how much before varies with the restaurant, and maybe with the mood of the staff, but it should be at least half an hour in moderate and budget places, and at least an hour further upmarket.

RESERVATIONS On the weekends, unless you eat especially early or late, reservations are generally recommended at top restaurants and at those on the high end of the moderate price range. A call ahead to check is a good idea at any time in Bruges and Ghent, where restaurants are often small and may be crowded with neighborhood devotees. Note that restaurants with outside terraces are always in big demand on pleasant summer evenings and fill up fast; make a reservation if the restaurant will let you—if not, get there early or forget it.

TIPPING See "Fast Facts: Belgium" later in this chapter.

BUDGET DINING Eating cheaply in Belgium is easily done. And, I'm happy to report, in many cases you can even eat cheaply in style, with candles on the table, flowers in the window, and music in the air. And though there's no such thing as a free lunch, there is the next best thing—a *plat du jour/dagschotel* (plate of the day). Belgians don't like to spend unnecessary euros, so almost every neighborhood has its modestly priced restaurant. Another way to combat escalating dinner tabs is to take advantage of the tourist menu that many restaurants offer.

SMOKING Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp—and all other towns and cities in Belgium—could learn something from New York. But don't hold your breath. Or, *do* hold your breath. Cigarette smokers in restaurants are everywhere, and like as not, they'll be rolling their own from foul-smelling loose tobacco. Even cigar and pipe smokers light up, all without so much as a by-your leave. The resulting smog gets puffed up the noses of neighboring diners, as if secondhand smoke was an essential ingredient of any decent meal. Nonsmoking rooms or separate nonsmoking sections in restaurants and cafes are rare enough to warrant being placed in museums as exhibits. So be warned. If possible, try to get a table outside on warm afternoons and balmy evenings.

15 Suggested Itineraries

The sheer diversity of historical, cultural, and entertainment attractions in Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp means you could easily spend your entire vacation in any one of them, no matter how much or how little time you have available. Most of your sightseeing can be done in easy day trips from a Brussels base, but I recommend also spending a night in Bruges, if possible.

THE HIGHLIGHTS IN 3 DAYS

You need to be really pushed for time, and really motivated, to do this. Stay in Brussels. Spend 1 complete day in Brussels. On day 2 take the train to Bruges and spend the rest of the day there. On day 3 take the train to Ghent and then the train from Ghent to Antwerp. You *can* do this, because trip times by train are short and departures frequent, but it's a bare-bones minimum, reconnaissance-type exercise.

THE HIGHLIGHTS IN 5 DAYS

You could stick to an itinerary similar to the one above, but do things at a more human pace, and you can afford to pack and unpack at least once.

Spend the first 2 days in Brussels; on day 3 head for Bruges and stay overnight to be there on day 4 also; then spend day 5 doing the highlights of Ghent and Antwerp. This way you'll have an adequate bite at Brussels and Bruges, without being too rushed. I still don't like day 5 much, but it's the price you pay for a better view of the two main cities, and it can be done.

IF YOU HAVE 1 WEEK

This time scale brings other options within range. I'd stick with 2 days for Brussels, but keep a day in reserve for side trips, either from this city—to Waterloo, Mechelen, or Leuven—or from Bruges. Two days is enough for Bruges also, and if you've not expended that reserve day on a side trip from Brussels, use it up now on one from Bruges—to Ostend or Ypres. That leaves you a day each for Ghent and Antwerp, unless you still have the reserve day in your pocket to give you a second day in one of these fine cities.

FAST FACTS: Belgium

Airport See "Orientation" in chapter 3.

American Express See "Fast Facts: Brussels" in chapter 3.

Area Codes See "Telephones" below.

ATMs See "Money" earlier in this chapter.

Business Hours Banks are usually open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30pm, and some branches are also open on Saturday morning. Stores generally stay open from 10am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, though more and more are also open on Sunday. Most department stores have late hours on Friday, remaining open until 8 or 9pm.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around Belgium" earlier in this chapter.

Climate See "When to Go" earlier in this chapter.

Currency See "Money" earlier in this chapter.

Currency Exchange See "Money" earlier in this chapter.

Driving Rules See "Getting Around Belgium" earlier in this chapter.

Drugs Belgium has rigid prohibitions against the possession and use of controlled narcotic drugs, and a strict enforcement policy that virtually guarantees stiff fines and/or jail sentences for offenders. This can be especially important if you are traveling from neighboring Holland, where the rules are more tolerant and enforcement (for soft drugs) is generally lax.

Drugstores For such items as toothpaste, deodorant, and razor blades, go to a supermarket. See also "Pharmacies" below.

Electricity Belgium runs on 220 volts electricity (except for 110-volt shaver outlets); North America uses 110 volts. So if you plan to bring a hair dryer, radio (other than battery-operated), travel iron, or any other small appliance, you need to take with you a small voltage transformer and a European-style adapter plug, available from drug and appliance stores and by mail order, that plugs into the round-holed European electrical outlet.

Embassies These are all in Brussels. **U.S.:** bd. du Régent 25–27 (✆ **02/508-21-11;** www.usembassy.be; Métro: Arts-Loi), open for visa applications

Monday to Friday from 9am to noon, and for assistance to U.S. citizens from 1:30 to 4:30pm. **Canada:** av. de Tervuren 2 (✆ **02/741-06-11;** Métro: Merode), open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am to noon and 2 to 4pm, Tuesday and Thursday from 9am to noon. **U.K.:** rue Arlon 85 (✆ **02/287-62-11;** Métro: Maalbeek), open for visa applications Monday to Friday from 9:30am to noon, and for other matters from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 4:30pm. **Australia:** rue Guimard 6–8 (✆ **02/286-05-00;** Métro: Arts-Loi), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 4pm. **New Zealand:** Square de Meeûs 1 (✆ **02/512-10-40;** Métro: Trone), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 3:30pm. **Ireland:** rue Wiertz 50 (✆ **02/235-66-76;** Métro: Schuman), open Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ✆ **101.** For an ambulance or the fire department, call ✆ **100.**

Holidays See "When to Go" earlier in this chapter.

Information See "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter.

Language Belgian people speak either French or Dutch (or as you may hear it called, Flemish), and a tiny minority in the east of the country is German-speaking. Brussels is bilingual—French and Dutch; almost all other places covered in this book are in Flanders, and so the main language is Dutch. Many Belgians speak two or all three of the national tongues, but, since language is a sensitive subject in the land, they might not be willing to prove this by actually doing so in practice. English is in effect the second language, and it is taught in the schools from the early grades, with the result that many Belgians speak fluently. You may speak English in Belgium almost as freely as you do at home, particularly to anyone in the business of providing tourist services, whether cab driver, hotel receptionist, waitperson, or store assistant.

Lost & Found Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ✆ **800/847-2911** or 410/581-9994. American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ✆ **800/221-7282.** MasterCard holders should call ✆ **800/307-7309** or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ✆ **800/555-1212.**

If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (✆ **800/325-6000;** www.westernunion.com).

Identity theft or fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you've lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are **Equifax** (✆ **800/766-0008;** www.equifax.com), **Experian** (✆ **888/397-3742;**

www.experian.com), and **TransUnion** (✆ **800/680-7289;** www.transunion.com). Finally, if you've lost all forms of photo ID, call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you've filed.

Mail Postage for a postcard or letter to the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa is .85€ ($1.05); to the U.K. and Ireland, .45€ (55¢).

Newspapers & Magazines News vendors at rail stations and many other locations have the *International Herald Tribune* and *USA Today* on sale Monday to Saturday; *Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* are available weekly; and other U.S. business and consumer magazines are also widely available. All national daily and Sunday British newspapers are sold here as well. For English-speaking visitors, the most useful publication is the weekly magazine ***The Bulletin,*** published each Thursday and filled with news, articles, information on special events, and useful addresses.

Passports For Residents of the **United States:** Whether you're applying in person or by mail, you can download passport applications from the U.S. State Department website at **http://travel.state.gov**. For general information, call the National Passport Agency (✆ **202/647-0518**). To find your regional passport office, either check the U.S. State Department website or call the National Passport Information Center toll-free number (✆ **877/487-2778**) for automated information.

For Residents of **Canada:** Passport applications are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central Passport Office, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (✆ **800/567-6868; www.ppt.gc.ca**).

For Residents of the **United Kingdom:** To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-year passport for children under 16), visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency or contact the United Kingdom Passport Service at ✆ **0870/521-0410** or search its website at **www.ukpa.gov.uk**.

For Residents of **Ireland:** You can apply for a 10-year passport at the Passport Office, Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (✆ **01/671-1633; www.irlgov.ie/iveagh**). Those under age 18 and over 65 must apply for a €12 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (✆ **021/272-525**) or at most main post offices.

For Residents of **Australia:** You can pick up an application from your local post office or any branch of Passports Australia, but you must schedule an interview at the passport office to present your application materials. Call the Australian Passport Information Service at ✆ **131-232,** or visit the government website at **www.passports.gov.au**.

For Residents of **New Zealand:** You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the Passports Office at ✆ **0800/225-050** in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to **www.passports.govt.nz**.

Pharmacies For both prescription and nonprescription medicines, go to a pharmacy (*pharmacie* in French; *apotheek* in Dutch). Regular pharmacy hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm (some close earlier on Sat). Each pharmacy has a list of late-night pharmacies posted on the door.

Police For emergency police assistance, call ✆ **101.**

Post Office Most post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Radio & Television You'll hear French, Dutch, and German on television and radio, as well as an occasional imported English-language program. BBC World Service Radio is broadcast on medium wave throughout the day, and you can pick up BBC Radio 4 with fairly good reception on long wave.

Restrooms Maybe you better sit down for this one. In primarily French-speaking Brussels, these likely will display an "H" or *Hommes* for men, and an "F" or *Femmes* for women; in Dutch-speaking Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, it'll be an "H" or *Heeren* for men, and a "D" or *Damen* for women (or there'll be a graphic that should leave no doubt either way). Be sure to *pay the person* who sits at the entrance to a *toilette.* He or she has a saucer where you put your money. If you don't, you might have a visitor in the inner sanctum while you're transacting your business. Even if you have paid, in busy places the attendant may have forgotten your face by the time you emerge and will then pursue you out of the toilet and along the street. It's tiresome, but toilets usually cost only about .30€ (40¢).

Safety See "Health & Safety" earlier in this chapter.

Taxes On top of a 16% service charge, there's a value-added tax (TVA) of 6% on hotel bills and a whopping 21.5% on restaurant bills. The higher rate is charged on purchased goods too. If you spend over 125€ ($156) in some stores and you are not a resident of the European Union, you can recover it by having the official receipt stamped by Belgian Customs on departure and returning the stamped receipt to the store. Stores that offer tax-free shopping advertise with a TAX-FREE SHOPPING sign in the window, and they provide you with the form you need to recover value-added tax (TVA/BTW) when you leave the European Union. Your refund should arrive by check or be credited to your credit card within a few weeks. Not all stores participate in this scheme so it pays to ask first, particularly for major purchases.

Telephones The country code for Belgium is **32.** When calling Belgium from abroad, you do not use the initial **0** in the area code. For example, if you're calling a Brussels number (area code **02**) from outside Belgium, you dial the international access code (which is **011** when calling from North America, and **00** from elsewhere in Europe) and then **32-2,** followed by the subscriber number.

You only dial the initial **0** of the area code if you're calling within Belgium (and this includes if you're calling another number in the same area code zone). When you call someone in Belgium, you always need to use the telephone area code even if you're calling from inside the same area. The two main formats for Belgian phone numbers are: For the main cities, a two-digit area code followed by a seven-digit number; and for other places, a three-digit area code followed by a six-digit number.

For information inside Belgium, call ✆ **1207** or ✆ **1307;** for international information in English, call ✆ **1405.**

To make international calls from Belgium, first dial **00** and then the country code. To call the United States or Canada, dial **00** (the international

access code) + **1** (the country code) + the area code + the number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 00-1-202-588-7800. Other country codes are: United Kingdom, **44;** Ireland, **353;** Australia, **61;** New Zealand, **64.** International calls, per minute, cost: **U.S., Canada, U.K., Ireland:** .35€ (45¢); **Australia, New Zealand:** 1€ ($1.25).

You can use most pay phones in booths all around town with a Belgacom *telecard* (phone card), selling for 5€ ($6.25), 10€ ($13), and 25€ ($31), from post offices, train ticket counters, and newsstands. Some pay phones take coins—.20€, .50€, and 1€. Both local and long-distance calls from a pay phone are .25€ (30¢) a minute at peak time (Mon–Fri 8am–7pm) and the same amount for 2 minutes at other times. Calls placed through your hotel switchboard or dialed direct from your room phone are usually more than twice the standard rate.

To charge a call to your calling card, call: **AT&T** (✆ 0800/100-10); **MCI** (✆ 0800/100-12); **Sprint** (✆ 0800/100-14); **Canada Direct** (✆ 0800/100-19); or **British Telecom** (✆ 0800/100-24).

Time Zone Belgium is on Central European Time (CET), which is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) plus 1 hour. Brussels is normally 6 hours ahead of New York time and 9 hours ahead of Los Angeles time. Clocks are moved ahead 1 hour each year at the end of March and back 1 hour at the end of September.

Tipping The prices on most restaurant menus already include a service charge of 16%, so it's unnecessary to tip. However, if the service is good, it's usual to show appreciation with a tip. It's enough to round up the bill to the nearest convenient amount, if you wish, rather than leave a full-fledged tip. Otherwise, 10% is adequate, and more than most Belgians would leave. A service charge is included in your hotel bill as well. Taxis include the tip in the meter reading. You can round up the fare if you like, but need not add a tip unless you have received an extra service like help with luggage. Here's a general guide to tipping for other services: give 1€ ($1.25) to ushers in some theaters and cinemas, 20% of the bill for hairdressers (leave it with the cashier when you pay up), and 1€ to 2€ ($1.25–$2.50) per piece of luggage for porters.

Useful Phone Numbers U.S. Dept. of State Travel Advisory ✆ **202/647-5225** (manned 24 hr.). U.S. Passport Agency ✆ **202/647-0518.** U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler's Hot Line: ✆ **404/332-4559.** See also "Embassies" and "Lost & Found "above.

Water The water from the faucet in Belgium is safe to drink. Many people drink bottled mineral water, generally Belgian brands like Spa and Bru.

3

Settling into Brussels

A city with a notable history, Brussels is carving out a bright future. The "capital of Europe" has begun to act like Europe's Washington, D.C., a focus of economic and political power, where decisions are made that affect the lives of people around the world. Headquarters of the European Union (E.U.), Brussels both symbolizes the Continent's vision of unity and is a bastion of officialdom, a breeding ground for the regulations that govern and often exasperate the rest of Europe.

Bruxellois have ambivalent feelings about their city's transformation into a power center. At first, the waves of Eurocrats brought a new cosmopolitan air to a somewhat provincial city (though once the seat of emperors), but as old neighborhoods were leveled to make way for office towers, people wondered whether Brussels was losing its soul. After all, this city doesn't only mean politics and business. It helped to inspire surrealism and Art Nouveau, worships comic strips, prides itself on handmade lace and chocolate, and serves each one of its craft beers in its own unique glass.

Fortunately, not all of Brussels's individuality has been lost in this transition, and though the urban landscape has suffered from wanton "development," the city's spirit survives in traditional cafes, bars, bistros, and restaurants. Whether elegantly Art Nouveau or eccentrically festooned with posters, curios, and knickknacks, such centuries-old establishments provide a warm, convivial ambience that is peculiarly Belgian.

Bruxellois like things convivial and simple, yet stylish. If you are at home waving cutlery over a proud regional specialty, or feel at ease with a carefully crafted artisanal beer, or think that centuries-old traditions are not only worth keeping alive but still have meaning today—why, then, you should fit right in.

While uncovering the city's cultural treasures and secrets, you'll want to be sure to eat and drink well, to visit a street market, some chic stores, and take in a jazz evening, a concert, or a theater performance.

Damage Assessment

The heavy hits Brussels's architectural heritage has taken from a combination of unscrupulous property developers, venal local officials, and the steamroller of Euroconstruction, has led to the coining of a term to describe the condition: *Bruxellisation:* the destruction of beautiful old buildings and their replacement by dreary office blocks.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING

BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport, served by most major European airlines, and by many other international carriers, is at Zaventem, 14km (9 miles) northeast of the city center.

After you deplane, moving walkways take you to the inner Arrivals Hall, where you pass through Passport Control, Customs, and Baggage Reclaim (which has free luggage carts). When you clear Customs and pass through to the outer Arrivals Hall, facilities like currency exchange, ATMs, restaurants, bars, shops, baby-rooms, restrooms, showers, baggage lockers, an airport information desk, car-rental and hotel reservation desks, and more, are available, all in a single location. Bus, shuttle, and taxi stops are just outside. The airport rail station is downstairs.

GETTING INTO TOWN FROM THE AIRPORT There's direct train service to Brussels's three main stations (Gare du Nord, Gare Centrale, and Gare du Midi) every 20 minutes between 5:43am and 11:14pm, for a one-way fare of 2.10€ ($2.65). The trip time to Gare Centrale is around 25 minutes. Most airport trains have wide corridors and extra space for baggage.

The **Airport Line bus,** no. 12, departs from the airport every 25 to 30 minutes to place Schuman (Métro: Schuman) in the European District, with stops on the way, for 3€ ($3.75). **De Lijn bus** BZ connects the airport hourly with Gare du Nord rail station, for the same price.

Taxis are expensive, but they're the preferred choice if your luggage is burdensome or if there are two or more people to share the cost. Don't hire a taxi from one of the illegal touts who may approach you as you leave the terminal building: You are likely to be overcharged. Go instead to the taxi stand and wait your turn for one of the many legitimate taxis. Those that display an orange sticker depicting a white airplane offer reduced fares from the airport to the city center; others charge about 30€ ($38), and some offer reduced rates for a prebooked return journey (ask your driver for details). Remember, service is already included in the fare.

BY TRAIN

Brussels is well served by high-speed trains—Eurostar through the Channel Tunnel from London, and the distinctive, burgundy-colored Thalys connecting to Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. For Eurostar information and reservations, call ✆ **08701/606600** in Britain or **02/528-28-28** in Belgium; or visit **www.eurostar.com**. For Thalys information and reservations, call ✆ **02/528-28-28** in Belgium, **08/3635-3536** in France, **0221/19419** in Germany, or **0900/9226** in Holland, or visit **www.thalys.com**. In addition, there are Trans-Europe Express (TEE), International (INT), and Eurocity (EC) international services arriving from throughout Europe; and Intercity (IC), Inter-Regional (IR), and Local (L) services from around Belgium (and IC trains from Amsterdam).

There are five big rail stations in the Brussels metropolitan area. Travelers arriving from other European countries will probably want to get off at one of the three main stations: **Gare Centrale,** Carrefour de l'Europe 2; **Gare du Midi,**

rue de France 2 (which is also the Eurostar and Thalys terminal); and **Gare du Nord,** rue du Progrès 86. Gare Centrale and Gare du Midi both have hotel reservation desks. Other facilities at all three stations include a *bureau de change,* where you can exchange traveler's checks, U.S. dollars, and other currencies (see "Currency Exchange" in "Fast Facts: Brussels," later in this chapter), ATMs, train info center, luggage lockers, restaurants and snack bars, newsstands, and other small specialist stores. All three stations are served by Métro trains, trams, buses, and taxis. Trains traveling within Belgium may also stop at **Gare du Quartier Léopold,** place du Luxembourg, close to the European District; and **Gare de Schaerbeek,** place Princesse Elisabeth 5 (which also is the international auto-rail terminal), in the north of the city.

A train ticket to or from *Bruxelles Agglomération* (Brussels Metropolitan Area) is valid for any of the city's five stations. For train information and reservations, call ✆ **02/528-28-28** or visit **www.sncb.be**.

Warning: Muggers, attracted by rich pickings from international travelers, haunt the Gare du Midi's surroundings; pickpockets and bag-snatchers work the interior. The police seem unable to control the problem. To avoid the threat, do not go to or from the station on foot—take a taxi or public transportation. Inside the station, keep a close eye on your possessions.

BY BUS

Eurolines (www.eurolines.com) has service three times daily from London's Victoria Coach Station, via the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle train, to Brussels. For schedule and fare information on this, and on Eurolines service from all other major towns and cities in Europe, contact Eurolines at ✆ **08705/808080** in Britain and **02/274-13-50** in Belgium. Most buses from continental destinations arrive on **rue Fonsny** beside Gare du Midi, though some stop at various city center locations around **place de Brouckère.** Many travel agents have schedules and fares. There is not much fast regional bus service in Belgium (trains do most of the work); many regional buses depart from **Gare du Nord.**

BY CAR

Should you be driving to Brussels, you are advised to park your car at the hotel parking lot (if it has one) and leave it there. You won't need a car to get around.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The city tourist office is **Brussels International Tourism,** Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall), Grand-Place, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/513-89-40;** fax 02/513-83-20; www.brusselsinternational.be; Métro: Gare Centrale). It has available very good information, including a comprehensive visitors' booklet, *Brussels Guide & Map.* It also makes hotel reservations, organizes paid-for guided walking tours in summer, and has well-trained, multilingual tour guides whom you can engage by the hour or day. The office is open in summer daily from 9am to 6pm, and in winter Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, and Sunday from 10am to 2pm.

Also in Brussels is the **Belgian Tourist Information Center,** rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 63, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/504-03-90;** fax 02/513-04-75; www.visitflanders.com; Métro: Gare Centrale), which covers the entire country. Its Flemish section covers Brussels and the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders. The office is open April to October, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, and weekends and holidays from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm; November to March, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm, and Sunday from 9am to 1pm.

Tips Student Deals

Students with appropriate ID can get **half-price tickets** to many cultural events, and discounts on train and plane fares and certain tours. **Acotra,** rue de la Madeleine 51, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/512-86-07;** Métro: Gare Centrale), sells discount student train, plane, boat, and bus tickets and books accommodations in youth hostels and private rooms. It also sells the ISIC (International Student Identity Card). Across a small park from Gare Centrale, toward the Grand-Place, it's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5:30pm.

CITY LAYOUT

A city of one million inhabitants, Brussels is divided into 19 communes (local government districts). Brussels's commune, the heart-shaped inner city, roughly 2.5km (1½ miles) in diameter, within the inner ring road that follows the line of the old city walls, is where most of the city's premier sightseeing attractions are located. Still, the 18 other separate, self-governing communes that comprise Brussels Capital Region offer many sightseeing attractions of their own. Most communes don't have as distinct a character as Paris's *arrondissements* or London's boroughs, and from a visitor's perspective, the communes and their boundaries are less useful than a geographic and social consideration of the city. Around 14% of the total area of 160 sq. km (63 sq. miles) is occupied by parks, woods, and forest, making this one of Europe's greenest urban centers.

The city center, once ringed by 14th-century fortified ramparts that were demolished in the 19th century, is now encircled by broad boulevards known collectively as the **Petite Ceinture.** Brussels is flat in its center and western reaches, where the now-vanished River Senne once flowed. To the east a range of low hills rises to the upper city, which is crowned by the Royal Palace and has some of the city's most affluent residential and prestigious business and shopping districts. The **Grand-Place** (*Grote Markt* in Dutch) stands at the very heart of Brussels, and is both a starting point and reference point for most visitors. An excellent railway network runs almost directly through the middle of the city, with **Gare du Nord (Noord Station)** just across the northern rim of the Petite Ceinture, **Gare Centrale (Centraal Station)** in the city center not far from the Grand-Place, and **Gare du Midi (Zuidstation)** near the southern rim.

Brussels sits smack dab on Europe's great continental divide, the oftentimes edgy interface between its Latin south and Germanic north. You'll hear both French and Dutch (along with a Babel of other tongues) spoken in its streets. It is bilingual: *Bruxelles* in French and *Brussel* in Dutch, and street names and places are in both languages. Grand-Place is *Grote Markt* in Dutch; Gare Centrale is *Centraal Station;* Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie is *Koninklijke Munttheater.* For convenience and to save space, I use only the French names in this chapter.

STREET MAPS Go to Brussels International Tourism and pick up its *Brussels Guide,* which has a fairly detailed street map of the inner city, with principal tourist attractions marked. If you need a comprehensive street map, you can buy the *Géocart Bruxelles et Périphérie* at most news vendors and bookstores.

FINDING AN ADDRESS Wherever possible in this book, I've attempted to locate the addresses given by adding the name of a nearby square, a major

thoroughfare, or a well-known sight. In French, the primary local language in Brussels, *rue* means "street," *place* means "square," and both *avenue* and *boulevard* (shortened to *av.* and *bd.*, respectively) mean "avenue." If you want to know how to find an address in Dutch, see the "Finding an Address" box in "Getting Around Belgium" in chapter 2.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

The Lower Town The **Basse Ville,** the core area of the old center, has at its heart the **Grand-Place** and its environs. Two of the most traveled lanes nearby are restaurant-lined **rue des Bouchers** and **Petite rue des Bouchers,** part of an area known as the **Ilôt Sacré (Sacred Islet).** A block from the Grand-Place is the classical colonnaded **Bourse (Stock Exchange).** A few blocks north, on **place de la Monnaie,** is the Monnaie opera house and ballet theater, named after the coin mint that once stood here. Brussels's busiest shopping street, pedestrianized **rue Neuve,** starts from place de la Monnaie and runs north for several blocks. Just north of the center lies **Gare du Nord** and nearby place Rogier. Central Brussels also includes the **Marché-aux-Poissons (Fish Market)** district.

The Upper Town The **Haute Ville** lies east of and uphill from the Grand-Place, along rue Royale and rue de la Régence and abutting the unpretentious, working-class **Marolles** district. Lying between the Palais de Justice and Gare du Midi, the Marolles has cozy cafes, drinking-man's bars, and inexpensive restaurants; its denizens even speak their own dialect. The Upper Town is spread along an escarpment east of the center, where you find the second great square, **place du Grand-Sablon,** and its tranquil little neighbor, **place du Petit-Sablon,** the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, and the Royal Palace. If you head southwest and cross the broad **boulevard de Waterloo,** where you find the most exclusive designer stores, you come to **place Louise.** From here, Brussels's most fashionable thoroughfare, **avenue Louise,** runs south all the way to a large wooded park called the **Bois de la Cambre.** Both main streets are flanked by attractive residential side streets.

Beyond the center things start to get hazier. On either side of **avenue Louise,** a chic boulevard south of the city center, are the classy districts of Ixelles and Uccle; they're both good areas for restaurants and shopping and both border the wide green spaces of the Bois de la Cambre and the Forêt de Soignes. East of this zone, the **Ixelles** district, near the Free University, has many casual, inexpensive restaurants, bars, and cafes.

East of the city center lies a part of Brussels whose denizens are regarded by many Bruxellois with the same suspicion they might apply to just-landed extraterrestrials. I refer, of course, to the **European Union district** around place Schuman, where the European Commission, Parliament, and Council of Ministers buildings jostle for space in a warren of offices populated by civil servants, journalists, and lobbyists (the area also is home to a wealth of restaurants and cafes that cater to Euro-appetites). A quaint old neighborhood was made to disappear to make way for these noble edifices. North of Ixelles the modern European Union district surrounds **place Schuman.**

Native Behavior

Bruxellois are never happier than when they're setting eating irons to work on one of their country's proud regional cuisine specialties, and easing its assimilation with a carefully crafted artisanal Belgian beer, or three. If this can be done over an extended lunch, on the boss's time, and at the boss's expense, so much the better. You can join them in spirit, if not on expenses, by making lunch an important part of the day's proceedings.

Then, you need to get to complaining about the overpaid, underworked, arrogant, dimwitted, probably corrupt, expense-account-toting, comfortably pensioned "eurocrats" who run the bureaucracy—and boy, is that some bureaucracy—of the gravy train that goes by the name of the European Union and is ensconced like a bloated alien body in their midst. See, it's easy.

Who do you kiss and how often? Some rules of thumb: After a first formal handshake, people invariably kiss on meeting again, though the kiss is more like a peck on the cheek, or on each cheek; women kiss other women; men don't kiss other men until they know them better, when it's fine; and men should kiss all the women (and not return to the start of the line to kiss the prettiest ones again).

In the north of the city (and something of a leap of the imagination) is the **Bruparck.** Inside this recreation complex you find the Mini-Europe theme park; the 26-screen Kinepolis multiplex movie theater; a made-to-order village with stores, cafes, and restaurants; and the Océade water recreation center. Beside it is the Atomium, Brussels Planetarium, the Roi Baudoin Soccer Stadium, and the Parc des Expositions congress center.

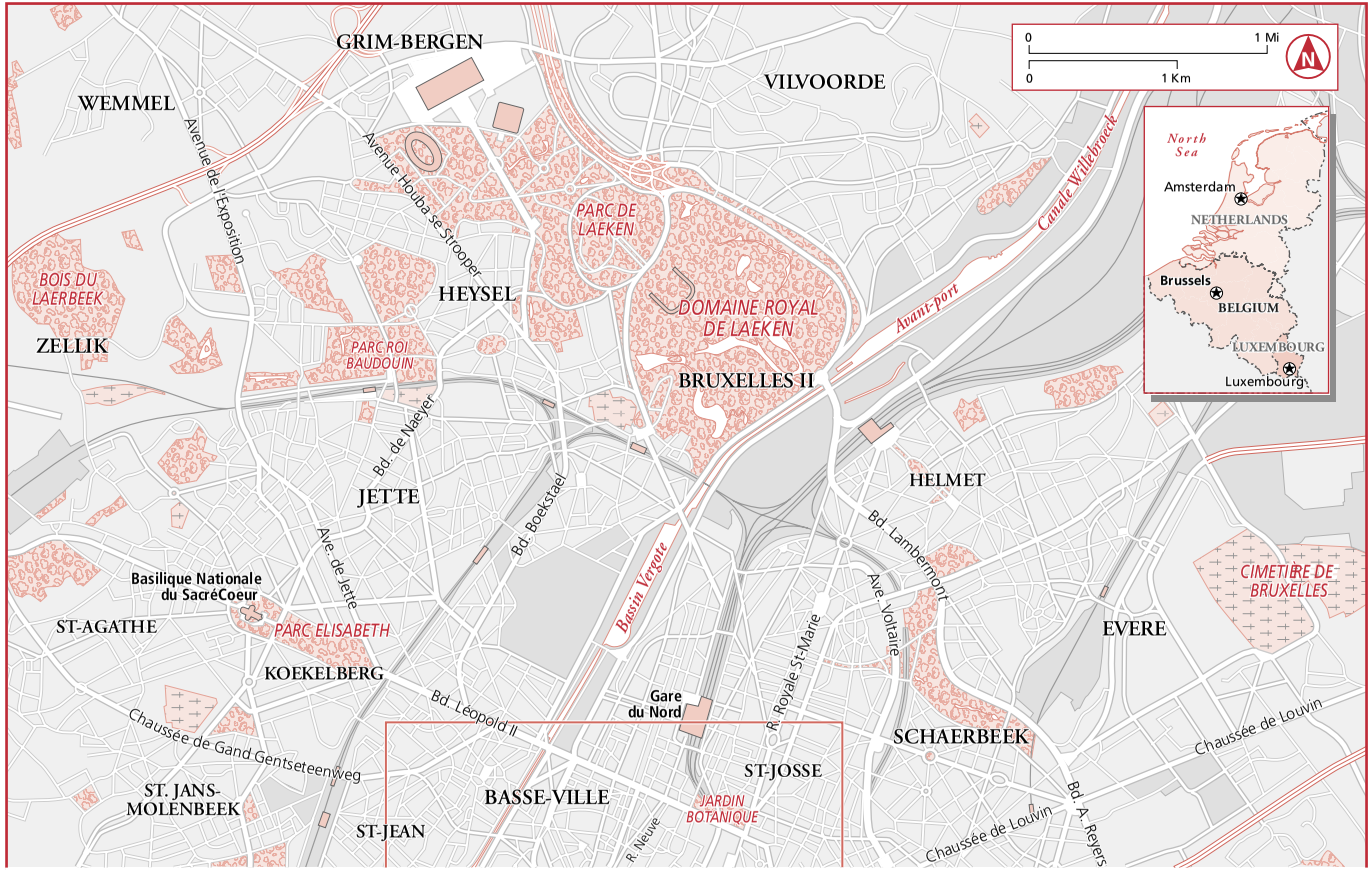
2 Getting Around

Brussels's city center is small enough that walking is a viable option, but it's not *that* small and traffic can be heavy and frantic, adding up to a tiring experience. The best solution if you have several days is to slice your time into segments for walking tours. Otherwise, a combination of walking and using the excellent public transportation is best. Beyond the center, public transportation is a virtual necessity.

Be especially careful when crossing roads at the black-and-white pedestrian crossings with no signals. Astonishingly, pedestrians at these crossings were only recently given legal priority over cars! Drivers are not yet completely reconciled to the new regulations. Also watch out for cars turning (legally) right or left at traffic lights, even when the green "walking man" indicates that you can cross.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Detailed maps of the integrated transit network—Métro (subway), tram (streetcar), and bus—are available free from the tourist office, from offices of the **STIB** public transportation company at Galérie de la Toison d'Or 15 (✆ **02/515-20-00;** www.stib.be), and from the Porte de Namur, Rogier, and Gare du Midi


GRIM-BERGEN
VILVOORDE
WEMMEL
Avenue de l'Exposition
Avenue Houba de Strooper
PARC DE LAEKEN
Canal Willebroeck
BOIS DU LAERBEEK
HEYSEL
DOMAINE ROYAL DE LAEKEN
Avant-port
ZELLIK
PARC ROI BAUDOUIN
BRUXELLES II
Bd. de Naeyer
JETTE
Bd. Boekstael
HELMET
Bd. Lambermont
Basilique Nationale du SacréCoeur
Ave. de Jette
Bassin Vergote
CIMETIERE DE BRUXELLES
ST-AGATHE
PARC ELISABETH
Ave. Voltaire
EVERE
KOEKELBERG
Gare du Nord
R. Royale-St-Marie
Bd. Léopold II
Chaussée de Gand-Gentseteenweg
SCHAERBEEK
Chaussée de Louvin
ST. JANS-MOLENBEEK
BASSE-VILLE
ST-JOSSE
JARDIN BOTANIQUE
R. Neuve
ST-JEAN
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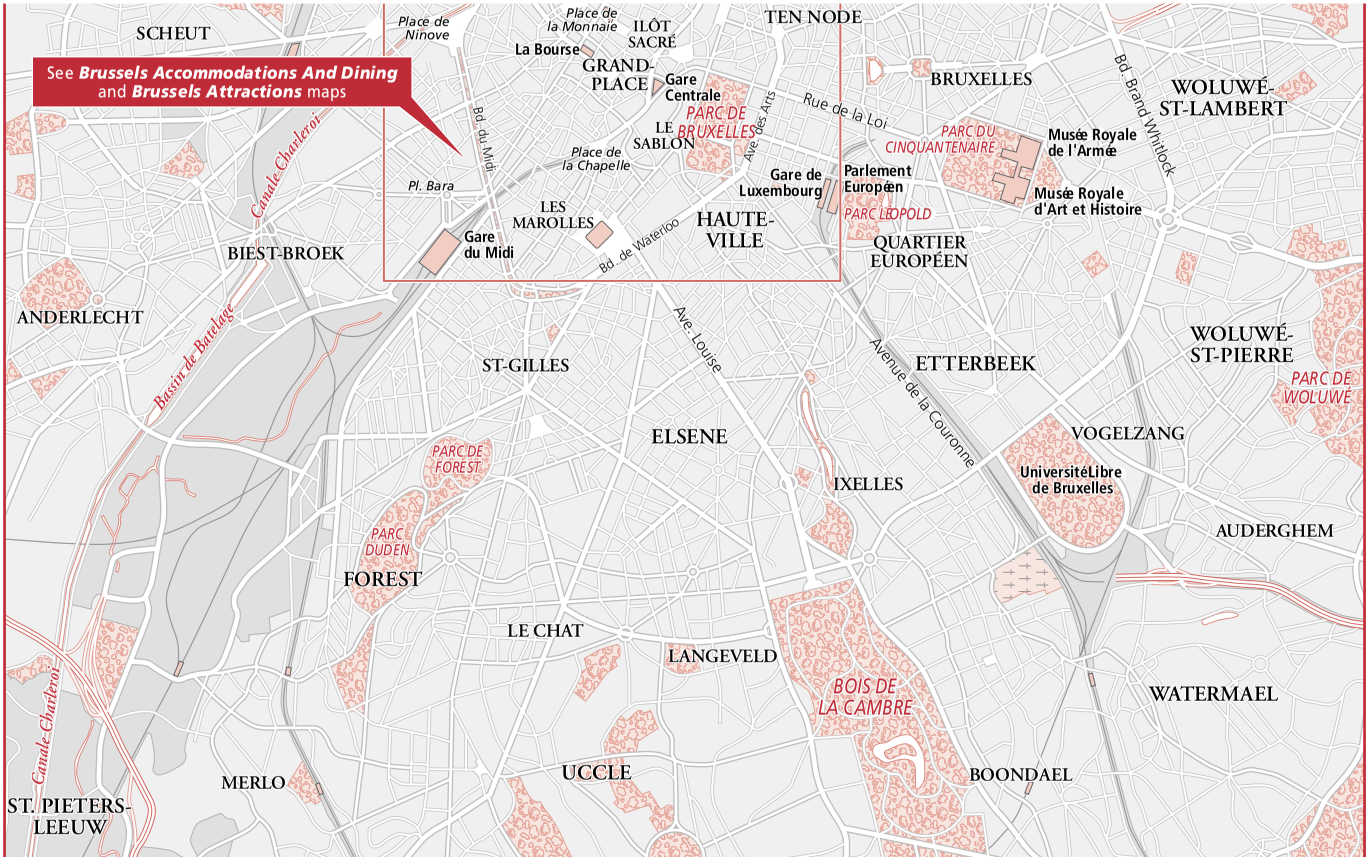
NETHERLANDS
Brussels
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
Luxembourg


See Brussels Accommodations And Dining and Brussels Attractions maps
SCHEUT
Place de Ninove
Place de la Monnaie
ILÔT SACRÉ
TEN NODE
La Bourse
GRAND-PLACE
Gare Centrale
PARC DE BRUXELLES
LE SABLON
BRUXELLES
WOLUWÉ-ST-LAMBERT
Bd. Brand Whitlock
Rue de la Loi
Ave des Arts
PARC DU CINQUANTENAIRE
Musée Royale de l'Armée
Musée Royale d'Art et Histoire
Bd. du Midi
Place de la Chapelle
Pl. Bara
Gare de Luxembourg
Parlement Européen
PARC LEOPOLD
Canal Charleroi
LES MAROLLES
HAUTE-VILLE
QUARTIER EUROPÉEN
Gare du Midi
BIEST-BROEK
Bd. de Waterloo
ANDERLECHT
Bassin de Batelage
Ave. Louise
ST-GILLES
ETTERBEEK
Avenue de la Couronne
WOLUWÉ-ST-PIERRE
PARC DE WOLUWÉ
ELSENE
VOGELZANG
PARC DE FOREST
IXELLES
UniversitéLibre de Bruxelles
AUDERGHEM
PARC DUDEN
FOREST
LE CHAT
LANGEVELD
BOIS DE LA CAMBRE
WATERMAEL
Canal Charleroi
MERLO
UCCLE
BOONDAEL
ST. PIETERS-LEEUW

Métro stations. In addition, all stations and most tram and bus shelters have maps that show the entire urban transit network. The full system operates from 6am to midnight, after which a limited night-bus system takes over. If possible, avoid the crush at morning and evening rush hours. Watch out for pickpockets, especially at busy times, and try to avoid walking alone in deserted access tunnels, particularly after dark—the risk of being mugged is small but not entirely absent.

Note: Public transportation links to the nearest station or stop are provided for many of the locations featured in this chapter. The option of choice is the nearest Métro station. The nearest tram (streetcar) or bus stop is listed for those instances where these are a better, or the only, option. All tram and bus stops are identified by a name at the stop itself and on STIB network maps, and on onboard route plans, in light-sign messages, and in driver or automated announcements.

FARE INFORMATION & DISCOUNT PASSES Tickets, which you can use interchangeably on the Métro, trams, and buses, cost 1.40€ ($1.75) for a single ride (known as a *direct*) and 6.50€ ($8.15) for a five-ride ticket, both of which you buy from the driver; 9.80€ ($12) for a 10-ride ticket available from Métro stations and rail stations; and 3.80€ ($4.75) for a 1-day ticket valid on all urban services (there also are several multiday options). Children under 12 ride free on the STIB transit network (children ages 6–11 first need to get a free pass called an *Abonnement J;* and a maximum of four children under 6 can ride free per paying adult).

VALIDATION You validate your ticket by inserting it into the orange electronic machines that stand inside buses and trams and at the access to Métro platforms. Though the ticket must be revalidated each time you enter a new vehicle, you are allowed multiple transfers within a 1-hour period of the initial validation, so you can hop on and off Métros, trams, and buses during that time and only one journey will be canceled by the electronic scanner. If more than one person is traveling on one ticket, the ticket must be validated each time for each traveler.

Brussels Métro trains, trams, and buses operate on the honor system, but teams of roving inspectors do their best to keep everyone honest. The fine for riding without a ticket or not having one that's properly validated is 55€ ($69), plus the fare for the ride, payable on the spot or within 3 days. This is for a first infraction; subsequent infractions cost more, up to a maximum of 380€ ($475).

BY METRO The Métro is quick and efficient, and covers many important city-center locations, as well as reaching out to the suburbs and to the Bruparck recreation zone and the Heysel congress center. Stations are identified by signs with a white letter *M* on a blue background. A trip underground takes you into an art center—Métro stations are decorated with specially commissioned paintings by contemporary Belgian artists.

Moments Underground Art

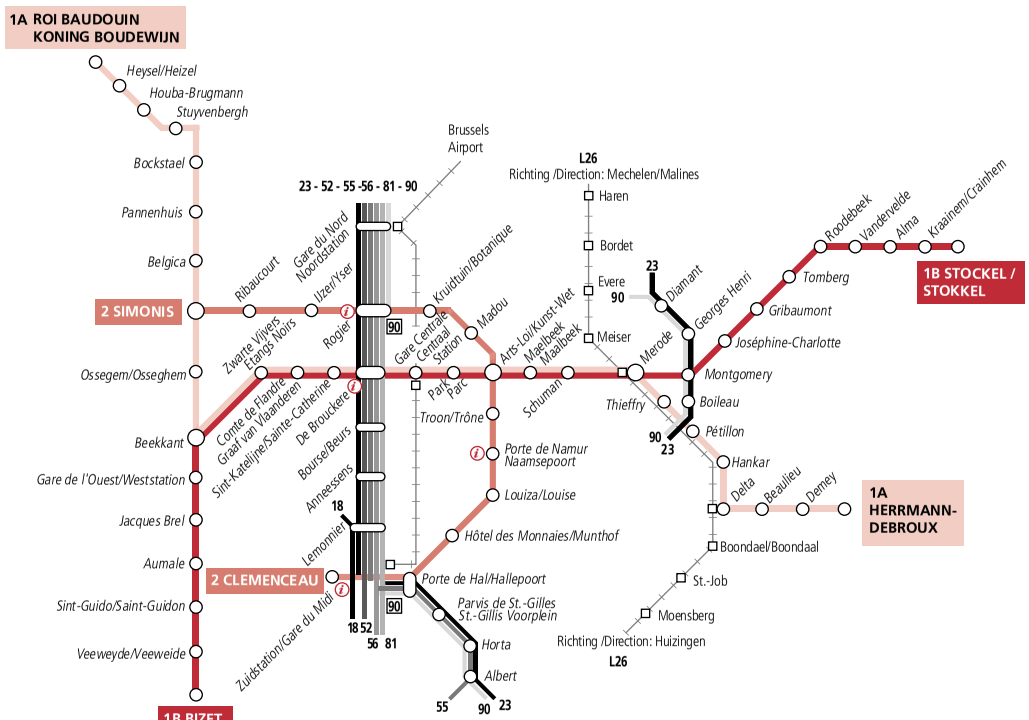
Most of Brussels's Métro stations have been decorated with works of art—a painting, a sculpture, a mosaic, an installation—by leading Belgian modern artists. Taken together, they form an underground museum that you can tour for the price of a Métro ticket.

METRO
- 1A Roi Baudouin/Koning Boudewijn - Herrmann-Debroux
- 1B Bizet - Stokkel/Stockel
- 2 Simonis - Clemenceau

TRAM
- 18 Houba-de Strooper - Dieweg
- 23 Gare du Nord/Noordstation - Heizel/Heysel
- 52 Esplanade - Drogenbos
- 55 Bordet (B) - Silence/Stilte
- 56 Schaarbeek Station/ Gare de Schaerbeek - Erasme (H)
- 81 Heysel/Heizel - Montgomery
- 90 Rogier - Zuidstation/Gare du Midi

TRAIN
- Gare SNCB/Station NMBS
- L26 : Mechelen/Malines - Huizingen
- Zuid/Midi - Nord/Noord - Brussels Airport

ⓘ Information



Tips Ride the Rails

Though not as fast as the Métro, trams are generally faster than buses and are a great way to get around, not least because you can view the cityscape while you ride. Lines 92, 93, and 94 pass by a bunch of key sights along rue Royale, rue de la Régence, and as far as avenue Louise.

BY TRAM & BUS An extensive network of tram lines provides the ideal way to get around the city. Both trams and urban buses are yellow in color. Their stops are marked with red-and-white signs and often have a shelter. You stop a tram or bus by extending your arm as it approaches so the driver can see it; if you don't signal, the bus or tram might not stop.

Two bus companies provide service to points outside the city (and stop at some points within it): TEC, with buses orange in color, covers French-speaking Wallonia; De Lijn, with buses white in color, covers Dutch-speaking Flanders.

BY TRAIN The rail network is not as useful within Brussels as the Métro, tram, and bus net. But if you find yourself at one city rail station and want to get to another one, the train can be the quickest way to go. The excellent Belgian rail network comes into its own for longer distances. It's the quickest and best way to get to Brussels National Airport, and to Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and other places covered in this book.

BY TAXI

The minimum rate for taxis is 2.35€ ($2.95) during the day and 4.20€ ($5.25) at night. Charges per kilometer are either 1.15€ ($1.45) or 2.30€ ($2.85), depending on location and time. Tip and taxes are included in the meter price, and you need not add an extra tip unless there has been extra service, such as helping with heavy luggage, though drivers won't refuse a tip in any circumstances. All taxis are metered. You cannot hail them in the street, but there are taxi stands on many principal streets, particularly in the center, as well as at rail stations. To request a cab by phone, call **Taxis Bleus** (✆ **02/268-00-00**), **Taxis Oranges** (✆ **02/349-43-43**), or **Taxis Verts** (✆ **02/349-49-49**).

BY CAR

Don't drive: It's a jungle out there. Good public transportation and an occasional taxi ride will get you anywhere you want inexpensively and hassle-free. Park your car either at your hotel or in one of the many public parking areas—your hotel can furnish the address of the nearest one—and do not set foot in it again until you're ready to leave the city. Belgium has some of Europe's worst road-accident statistics. Normally polite citizens of Brussels turn into red-eyed demons once they get behind the steering wheel. Driving is fast, except at rush hour, and always aggressive. At rush hour (which actually lasts about an hour to either side of 9am and 5pm), it is almost impossible to move on main roads inside the city and on the R0 outer ring road. Sundays and early mornings are better, and evenings are not too bad.

If you must drive, watch out for the notorious *priorité de droite* (priority from the right) system, whereby traffic merging from your right usually has priority (or right-of-way) to enter the road you're on, which means you must stop to allow it to do so, even if there is no other indication by way of street signs that you should. Be ready to stop instantly at all such intersections. Poles with orange

Road Non-Sense

I would describe the behavior of Brussels's car drivers as "piggish," a moderate term employed because finding the pertinent adjective would tax even the considerable powers of the English language as an instrument of personal abuse.

Part of the blame attaches to the *priorité de droite* traffic rule, whereby, in some cases (not always), traffic from the right has the right of way, even if it is coming from a minor road onto a more important one. You can imagine how this plays at multiple-road intersections, particularly since Belgians will relinquish their *priorité* under no known circumstances, cost what it might. For proof of this, just look at the number of autos with crumpled *left* sides.

Their piggish behavior is extended to pedestrians too. Don't expect cars to stop for you just because you're crossing at a black-and-white "pedestrian crossing." Many drivers look upon these, along with traffic lights and stop signs, merely as interesting and occasionally useful suggestions. It's only in recent times that drivers have been obliged legally to stop at these, and some of them haven't gotten the message yet.

diamond signs, which you see mostly on main roads, mean that priority lies with traffic already on the road, so you don't have to stop.

At most (but not all) rotaries, traffic entering the rotary usually has priority over traffic already on it, unless STOP lines on the road indicate otherwise. This system has caused so much mayhem that it's being changed at some accident hot spots and obvious danger zones. Not everyone knows about the changes or acts on them, so stay alert and be careful.

On-street parking meters have varying hours of operation and charges. City drivers should keep a supply of .20€, .50€, and 1€ coins on-hand. I wouldn't want to be held legally responsible for any adverse results of the following piece of information, but the parking rules are enforced pretty lamely in most of Brussels, when they are enforced at all. Exceptions to this are busy tourist zones like the environs of the Grand-Place, and security hot spots like the U.S. Embassy and the European District. In many other places, it's pretty common to see cars illegally parked or standing beside an empty meter. Should you choose, or need, to do likewise, be aware that Murphy's Law operates in Belgium too.

RENTALS Rental cars are available from **Hertz** (✆ **800/654-3001** in the U.S.), bd. Maurice Lemonnier 8, Brussels (✆ **02/720-60-44**); **Avis** (✆ **800/331-2112** in the U.S.), rue de France 2, Brussels (✆ **02/527-17-05**); **Budget,** av. Louise 327B, Brussels (✆ **02/753-21-70**); and **Europcar,** chaussée de Waterloo 538, Brussels (✆ **02/348-92-12**). All four companies have desks at Brussels National Airport. Expect to pay from 60€ ($75) a day, and 200€ ($250) a week, including insurance and other charges, and for unlimited mileage.

BY BICYCLE

Brussels's piggish drivers and biased road laws combine to make this a poor option. If you want to rent a bike anyway, try **Pro Vélo,** rue de Londres 15

(✆ **02/217-01-58;** www.provelo.be; Métro: Porte de Namur). July and August it's open daily from 9am to 6pm; September to June hours are Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm. Rental is 12€ ($15) for 1 day. They also organize bike tours with a commentary in English.

FAST FACTS: Brussels

American Express The office at bd. du Souverain 100, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/676-21-11;** Métro: Horrmann-Debroux), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 5pm. Call ahead before visiting, because this is an administrative office only, out in the suburbs, and has limited services for visitors—it does not cash traveler's checks, for instance.

Area Code The telephone area code for Brussels is **02.** You need to dial the **02** area code both from inside Brussels and from elsewhere in Belgium. The country code for Belgium is **32.** If you're phoning a Brussels number from the United States or from any other country, you don't dial the first **0** of the area code; you dial only **32-2.**

ATMs You'll find many **ATMs** around town, identified by BANCONTACT and MISTER CASH signs. A convenient bank with an ATM is **CBC,** Grand-Place 5 (✆ **02/547-12-11;** Métro: Gare Centrale), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Babysitters Many hotels can provide reliable babysitting service. A student babysitting roster is maintained by **U.L.B. Service,** "Jobs," avenue P. Héger 22, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **02/650-21-71**).

Business Hours **Banks** are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30 or 5pm. Open hours for **offices** are Monday to Friday from 9 or 10am to 4 or 5pm. Most **stores** are open Monday to Saturday from 9 or 10am to 6 or 7pm; some stay open on Friday until 8 or 9pm.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around" above.

Convention Centers **RAI Convention Center,** Europaplein (✆ **020/549-1212;** Métro: RAI), in the south of the city, hosts events including the Home Interiors Fair, the Dutch Art and Antiques Fair, the Love & Marriage Fair, and the Car Show.

Currency Exchange Change your money at a bank as a first choice. Another good option is **Thomas Cook,** Grand-Place 4, Brussels (✆ **02/513-28-45**). The Brussels office of **American Express** (see above) does not change American Express traveler's checks or handle any other cash transactions. The currency exchange offices *(bureaux de change)* at Brussels's three main rail stations—Gare du Nord, Gare Centrale, and Gare du Midi—also offer fair rates for cash and traveler's checks. The worst deals are at Brussels Airport, where exchange rates at all currency exchange offices in the Arrivals area are lousy, and at street currency exchange offices throughout the country, which often combine poor exchange rates with high commission charges—but remember these are often open when the banks are closed.

See also "Money" in chapter 2.

Doctors & Dentists For 24-hour emergency medical service, call ✆ **02/479-18-18;** ask for an English-speaking doctor. For emergency dental care, call ✆ **02/426-10-26.**

Drugstores See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2. See also "Pharmacies" below.

Electricity See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Embassies See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ✆ **101.** For an ambulance or the fire department, call ✆ **100.**

Hospital The **Cliniques Universitaires St-Luc,** av. Hippocrate 10 (✆ **02/764-11-11;** Métro: Alma), has an emergency department.

Information See "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter.

Internet Access In the city center, the large Internet center **easyEverything,** place de Brouckère 9–13 (✆ **02/211-08-20;** www.easyeverything.com; Métro: De Brouckère), is open 24 hours a day; access begins at 2.50€ ($3.15).

Language Brussels is bilingual: French and Dutch (Flemish), though the majority of residents are French-speaking. Many Bruxellois are fluent in English, and almost all speak at least some. And unlike Parisians, most are happy to do so. Stores, restaurants, and hotels are usually staffed by at least one or two fluent English-speakers.

Laundry & Dry Cleaning Laundry chain **Ipsomat** has a branch at rue Blaes 193 (Métro: Louise), open daily 7am to 10pm. Dry-cleaning chain **5 à Sec,** has a branch at rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 8 (Métro: Gare Centrale), open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm. Both chains have branches around town; check the phone book for the one nearest your hotel.

Mail See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Newspapers & Magazines For English-speaking visitors, the most useful publication is the weekly magazine the ***Bulletin,*** published each Thursday and filled with news, articles, information on special events, and useful addresses. See also "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Pharmacies A pharmacy is called a *pharmacie* in French and an *apotheek* in Dutch. Regular pharmacy hours are Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm (some close earlier on Sat). Try the centrally located **Grande Pharmacie de Brouckère,** Passage du Nord 10–12 (✆ **02/218-05-07;** Métro: De Brouckère). All pharmacies have details of nearby all-night and Sunday pharmacies posted on the door.

Police In an emergency, call ✆ **101.** In nonurgent situations go to **Brussels Central Police Station,** rue du Marché-au-Charbon 30 (✆ **02/279-79-79**). Many Brussels police officers have a poorly developed sense of public service, and a surly and unconcerned attitude to visitors' problems is not uncommon.

Post Office Most **post offices** are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. The office at Centre Monnaie, place de la Monnaie (✆ **02/226-21-11;** Métro: De Brouckère), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9:30am to 3pm. The office at Gare du Midi, av. Fonsny 1E/F (✆ **02/538-33-98;** Métro: Gare du Midi), is open 24 hours.

Radio & Television See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Restrooms See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2. Should you have a toilet emergency in Brussels, the very best address to find relief is at the Métropole hotel (see "Where to Stay" below).

Safety Brussels is generally safe, but there is a growing trend of pickpocketing, theft from and of cars, and muggings in places such as Métro station foot tunnels. Don't overestimate the risk, but take sensible precautions, particularly in obvious circumstances such as on crowded Métro trains and when taking cash from an ATM at night.

Taxes See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Telephones See "Area Code" above and "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Tipping See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, and Métro service, call ✆ **02/515-20-20.**

Useful Phone Numbers The baggage office (✆ **02/753-68-20**) in the Arrivals hall of Brussels National Airport can help if you have lost luggage or other property aboard an aircraft or in the airport. The bigger rail stations have lost-property offices as well; call ✆ **02/555-25-25** if you lose something on a train. Property lost on the Métro, tram, or bus may be recovered from STIB, avenue de la Toison d'Or 15 (✆ **02/515-23-94**). If you lose something in the street, try the local police station; many Belgians are honest enough to hand in property they've found.

3 Where to Stay

The business of Brussels is business (and politics), a fact reflected in the cost and nature of available accommodations. Hotels in the upper price range, including deluxe hotels of just about every international chain, have a wealth of facilities for business travelers and efficient, though invariably impersonal, service. At every level, hotels fill up during the week and empty out on weekends. July and August are quiet months throughout the week. In off-peak periods, rates can drop as much as 50% from those quoted below; be sure to ask for lower rates and confirm that you're quoted the correct rates, which include a 6% value-added tax and a 16% service charge. If you are traveling with kids, always ask about special rates for them. Many hotels allow a child to share his or her parent's room free or for a small extra charge.

All hotels have been designated according to their high-season rates. If breakfast is not included, expect to pay 5€ to 25€ ($6.25–$31) for a continental, buffet, or full breakfast, depending on the category of your hotel. Single rates are available in many hotels, though not always for a significant reduction over double occupancy. Only those hotels with rooms that all, or nearly all, have private facilities are listed here, even in the inexpensive category, unless there are compelling reasons for including a hotel where this is not the case. Only rates that apply to rooms with bathrooms are used to determine a hotel's price category. Room rates increase on average 5% annually.

Both Brussels International Tourism and the Belgian Tourist Office (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter) make reservations for the same day if

you go to their offices in person and pay a small fee (which the hotel deducts from your room rate). **Belgian Tourist Reservations,** bd. Anspach 111, 1000 Brussels (✆ **02/513-74-84;** fax 02/513-92-77; btr@horeca.be), provides a similar service. Brussels International Tourism publishes an annual *Hotel Guide* with listings organized by price range and can also provide complete information on the **hostels** of Brussels.

There's a hotel reservations booth for all of Belgium near the ticket counter at Gare Centrale; it doesn't accept telephone bookings.

AROUND THE GRAND-PLACE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Amigo ★★ In Brussels slang, an "amigo" is a prison, and indeed a prison once stood here, in a highly convenient location (both then and now) across the street from the Town Hall. But any resemblance to the former accommodations is purely nominal. Under new ownership, the Amigo has gone from being a worthy but somewhat dull lodging to among the city's finest. The hotel's Spanish Renaissance architecture, stately corridors, and flagstone lobby are right at home in this ancient neighborhood. Some of the previous incarnation's antiques, sculptures, wall tapestries, and wood accents have been retained, to good effect. The rooms are quite spacious and traditionally elegant, but with modern Flemish design touches to brighten things up—and Tintin motifs in the bathrooms to add an element of whimsy. Ask for a room with a view on the Town Hall's fantastic Gothic spire.

rue de l'Amigo 1–3 (off of the Grand-Place), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/547-47-47.** Fax 02/513-52-77. www.roccofortehotels.com. 174 units. 195€–500€ ($244–$625) double; from 890€ ($1,113) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 15€ ($19). Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar; lounge; health club; concierge; 24-hr. business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Bedford ★ This modern hotel, an easy walk from the Grand-Place, is tastefully decorated, the lobby reminiscent of an English country house. Most of the rooms have been refurbished recently and are furnished in a modern style. Some rooms have air-conditioning. A piano bar, the Bedford Lounge, serves a good selection of Belgian beers, and there's a reasonable restaurant, Le Magellan.

rue du Midi 135 (near place Rouppe), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/507-00-00.** Fax 02/507-00-10. www.hotelbedford.be. 326 units. 145€–320€ ($181–$400) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ ($25). Métro: Anneessens. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar.

Métropole ★★ Even if you're not staying here, the hotel is worth a visit on its own account. An ornate, marble-and-gilt interior distinguishes this late-19th-century hotel several blocks from the Grand-Place, intimating Victorian elegance without rejecting the convenience of modern amenities. Soaring ceilings, potted palms, and lavishly decorated public rooms add to the Belle Epoque allure. Spacious rooms have classic furnishings and some modern luxuries, including heated towel racks, hair dryers, and trouser presses. The elegant French restaurant L'Alban Chambon caters to the sophisticated diner, and the Belle Epoque **Café Métropole** (see "Where to Dine" later in this chapter) to the sophisticated cafe hound.

Brussels Accommodations & Dining

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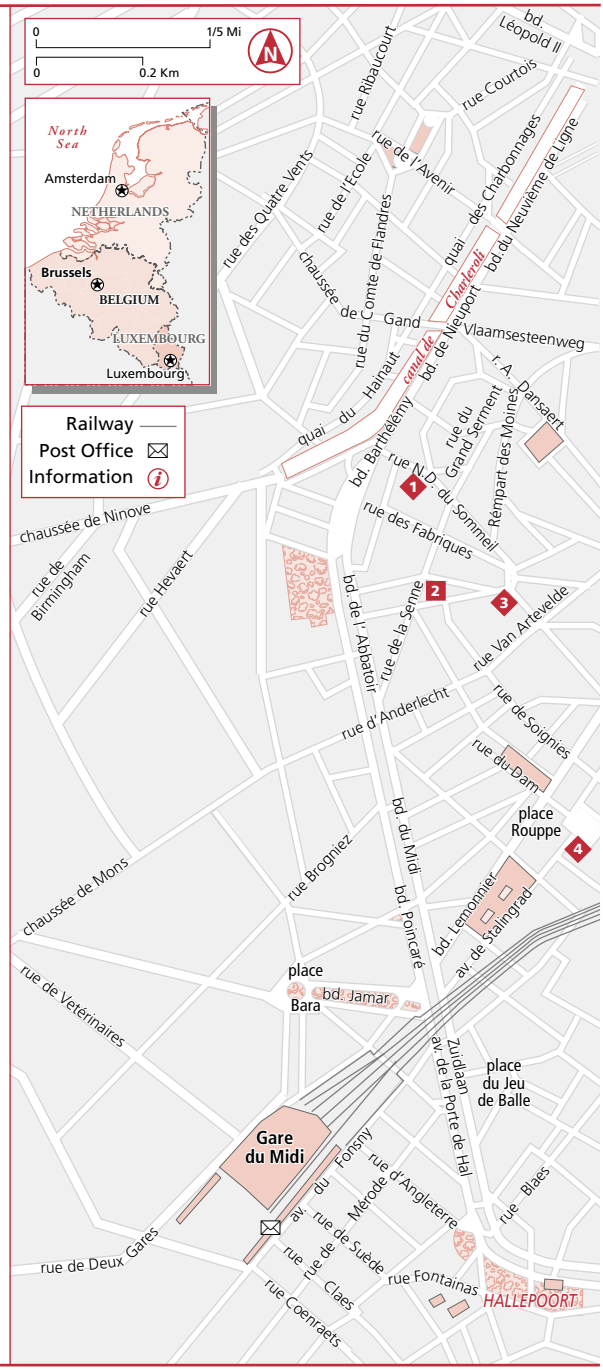

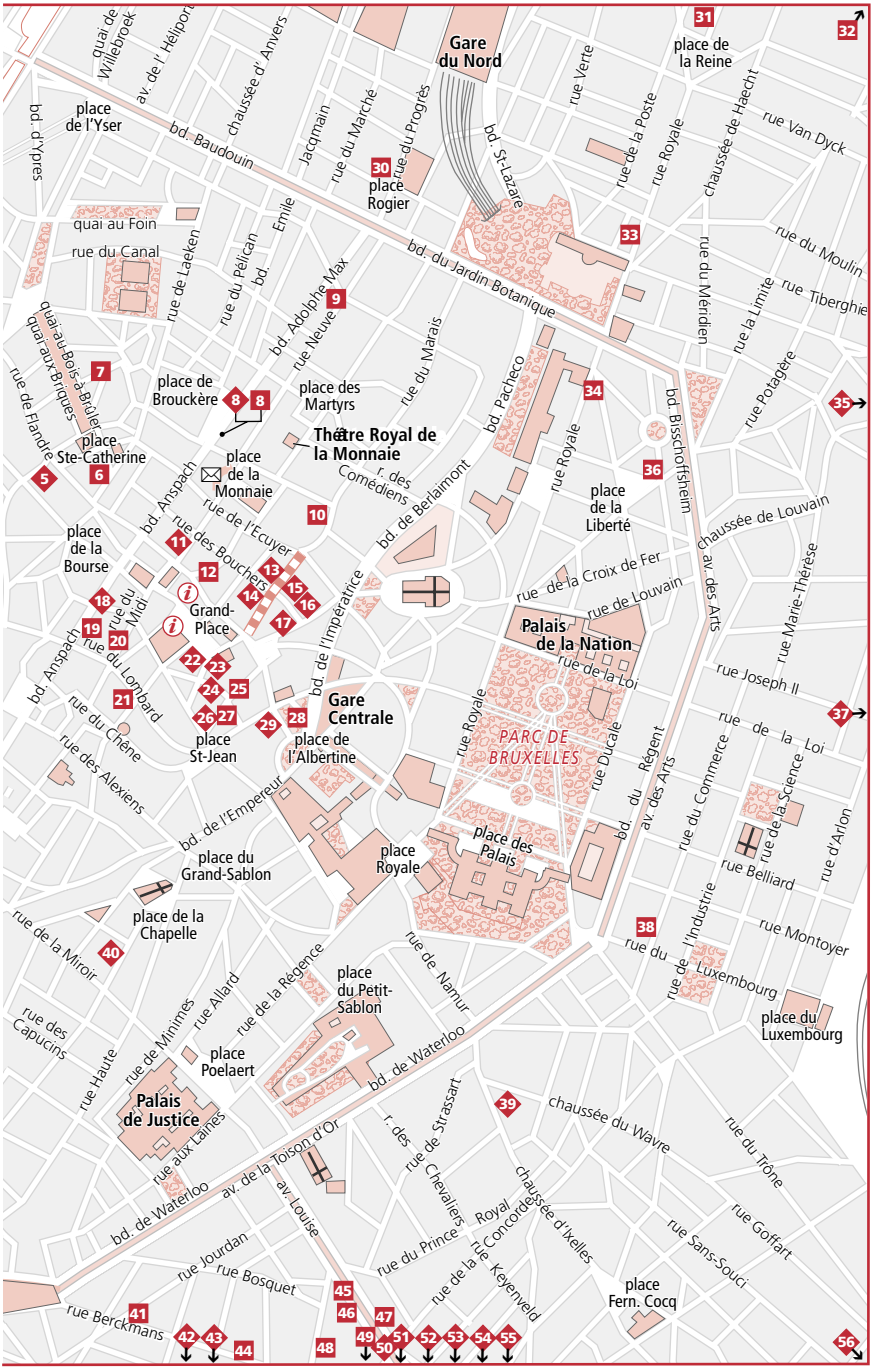
Gare du Nord
place de la Reine
place de l'Yser
bd. Baudouin
quai de Willebroek
av. de l'Héliport
chaussée d'Anvers
bd. d'Ypres
Jacqmain
rue du Marché
rue du Progrès
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bd. St-Lazare
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bd. Emile
bd. Adolphe Max
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bd. du Jardin Botanique
rue du Méridien
rue du Moulin
rue la Limite
rue Tiberghien
quai au Bois à Brûler
quai aux Briques
rue de Flandre
place Ste-Catherine
place de Brouckère
place des Martyrs
rue du Marais
bd. Pacheco
rue Royale
bd. Bisschoffsheim
rue Potagère
Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie
place de la Monnaie
r. des Comédiens
bd. Anspach
rue de l'Ecuyer
rue des Bouchers
bd. de Berlaimont
place de la Liberté
chaussée de Louvain
av. des Arts
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place de la Bourse
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rue du Midi
rue du Lombard
bd. de l'Impératrice
rue de la Croix de Fer
rue de Louvain
Palais de la Nation
rue de la Loi
rue Joseph II
Gare Centrale
place de l'Albertine
place St-Jean
rue du Chêne
rue des Alexiens
PARC DE BRUXELLES
rue Ducale
bd. du Régent
av. des Arts
rue du Commerce
rue de la Science
rue d'Arlon
rue Belliard
bd. de l'Empereur
place du Grand-Sablon
place Royale
place des Palais
rue de la Chapelle
rue de la Miroir
rue du Luxembourg
rue Montoyer
place du Luxembourg
rue de Namur
rue de la Régence
rue Allard
rue de Minimes
rue des Capucins
rue Haute
place du Petit-Sablon
place Poelaert
bd. de Waterloo
Palais de Justice
rue aux Laines
av. de la Toison d'Or
r. des Chevaliers
rue de Strassart
chaussée du Wavre
rue du Trône
av. Louise
bd. de Waterloo
rue Jourdan
rue Bosquet
rue du Prince Royal
chaussée d'Ixelles
rue de la Concorde
rue de Keyenveld
rue Goffart
rue Sans-Souci
place Fern. Cocq
rue Berckmans

place de Brouckère 31 (close to Centre Monnaie), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/217-23-00.** Fax 02/218-02-20. www.metropolehotel.com. 305 units. 329€–429€ ($411–$536) double; from 650€ ($813) suite. Rates include buffet or continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ ($16). Métro: De Brouckère. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge; sidewalk cafe; health club; spa; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Radisson SAS Modern yet in harmony with its neighborhood a few blocks from the Grand-Place, this highly regarded hotel incorporates part of the medieval city wall. The large rooms are decorated in a variety of styles, including Scandinavian, Asian, and Italian, and the Royal Club rooms are plushly upholstered. There's a huge atrium with cafe terraces and fountains; some rooms look out on this atrium rather than the outside world. The Sea Grill restaurant wins plaudits for its seafood, and the Bar Dessinée has a Belgian comic strip theme.

rue du Fossé-aux-Loups 47 (close to Galeries Royales St-Hubert) , 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **800/333-3333** in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/219-28-28. Fax 02/219-62-62. www.radissonsas.com. 281 units. 220€–405€ ($275–$506) double; 550€–890€ ($738–$1,113) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 25€ ($31). Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (seafood; Belgian/international); lounge; bar; health club; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; courtesy car; business center; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Royal Windsor This sparkling modern hotel just 2 blocks from the Grand-Place incorporates marble, polished wood, and gleaming brass and copper in its decor. The tone of elegance is set from the very first by the lobby and the huge circular medallion on the wall behind the reception desk that depicts all the duke of Wellington's major battles. All rooms are luxuriously furnished, and though some are a bit on the small side, none is really cramped. In the quietly elegant French restaurant **Les 4 Saisons,** seasonal menus and fine wines are served in a graceful setting of soft shades of pink and cream, amid an air of romantic intimacy. Then there's the Edwardian-style **Windsor Arms,** where light lunches and snacks are available amid lots of polished mahogany, etched glass, and leather upholstery. You can drink at the Waterloo Bar and dance until the wee hours at the Griffin's nightclub.

rue Duquesnoy 5 (between Grand-Place and Gare Centrale), 1000 Brussels. ✆ **02/505-55-55.** Fax 02/505-55-00. www.warwickhotels.com. 266 units. 270€–370€ ($338–$463) double; from 600€ ($750) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 15€ ($19). Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French/Belgian; Continental); lounge; bar; health club; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

MODERATE

Arlequin You can't get closer to the heart of the city than this, with the restaurant-lined rue des Bouchers right outside the hotel's back entrance. Then there's the fine view from some rooms of the Town Hall spire in the neighboring Grand-Place, which is spectacular when lit at night, and of the Old City's rooftops and narrow medieval streets from the top-floor breakfast room. The rooms are not quite so spectacular, but all have modern, comfortable furnishings and most have plenty of natural light.

rue de la Fourche 17–19 (off rue des Bouchers), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/514-16-15.** Fax 02/514-22-02. www.arlequin.be. 92 units. 125€ ($156) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, hair dryer.

Tips Paper Ploy

Cheeky but true: Should you either be on a very tight budget or can't pass up a chance to save a buck, go into the lobby of most any of the top hotels in town and read the daily papers for free and in comfort. Many such hotels have giveaway or lobby-only copies of the *International Herald Tribune,* the *Wall Street Journal Europe,* and the *Financial Times.* On second thought, if you're reading to check the health of your financial instruments, you can likely afford to buy your own paper.

Le Dixseptième ★★ This graceful, 17th-century house that was once the official residence of the Spanish ambassador stands close to the Grand-Place in a neighborhood of restored dwellings. Rooms have wood paneling and marble chimneys, are as big as suites in many hotels, and some have balconies. All are in 18th-century style and are named after Belgian painters from Brueghel to Magritte. Two beautiful lounges are decorated with carved wooden medallions and 18th-century paintings.

rue de la Madeleine 25 (off place de l'Albertine), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/502-57-44.** Fax 02/502-64-24. www.ledixseptieme.be. 24 units. 200€–400€ ($250–$500) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** Lounge; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Vendôme This is one of Brussels's most conveniently located moderately priced hotels, a short walk from good shopping, slightly farther to the Grand-Place. The rooms are rather plain but comfortably furnished. Breakfast is served in the cheerful, greenery-filled winter garden, which has a skylight to shed natural light. "Business Club" rooms are newer and larger and have air-conditioning.

bd. Adolphe-Max 98, 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/227-03-00.** Fax 02/218-06-83. www.hotel-vendome.be. 106 units. 180€–328€ ($225–$410) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ ($19). Métro: Brouckère or Rogier. **Amenities:** Restaurant (brasserie); lounge; bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

INEXPENSIVE

La Vieille Lanterne A tiny place with two rooms on each floor and no elevator, the hotel is diagonally across a narrow street from the *Manneken-Pis.* It can be hard to spot, as you enter through the side door of a trinket store selling hundreds of *Manneken-Pis* replicas. You should feel right at home in rooms with old-style leaded windows, and small bathrooms with marble counters and tiled walls. It's advisable to book well in advance.

rue des Grands Carmes 29 (facing *Manneken-Pis*), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/512-74-94.** Fax 02/512-13-97. 6 units. 75€ ($94) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Bourse. *In room:* TV.

Mozart Go a flight up from the busy, cheap-eats street level, and guess which famous composer's music wafts through the lobby? Salmon-colored walls, plants, and old paintings create a warm, intimate ambience that's carried into the rooms. Although furnishings are blandly modern, colorful fabrics and exposed beams lend each room a rustic originality. Several are duplexes with a sitting room underneath the loft bedroom. Top rooms have a great view.

rue du Marché-aux-Fromages 23 (off of Grand-Place), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/502-66-61.** Fax 02/502-77-58. www.hotel-mozart.be. 47 units. 95€ ($119) double. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. Métro: Gare Centrale. **Amenities:** Lounge. *In room:* TV.

Value Passport to Brussels

One of the best discounts is the **Brussels Card,** available from the Brussels International tourist office in the Grand-Place, and from hotels, museums, and offices of the STIB city transit authority, for 30€ ($38). Valid for 3 days, it allows free use of public transportation; free and discounted admission to around 30 of the city's museums and attractions; and discounts at some restaurants and other venues, and on some guided tours.

AROUND THE FISH MARKET

MODERATE

Ibis Brussels Centre Ste-Catherine This large, modern hotel in the fascinating (and central) Fish Market district is a member of one of Europe's leading budget-priced chains. The rooms are brightly furnished, and bathrooms have recently been fully renovated. There's also a children's play area to keep the tots amused while parents are relaxing.

rue Joseph-Plateau 2 (beside place Ste-Catherine), 1000 Brussels. ✆ **02/513-76-20.** Fax 02/514-22-14. www.accorhotels.com. 236 units. 85€–135€ ($106–$169) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Ste-Catherine. **Amenities:** Cafe; bar. *In room:* TV.

Welcome ★★ The name of this gem of a hotel, overlooking the Fish Market, couldn't be more accurate, thanks to the untiring efforts of the husband and wife proprietors. You can think of it as a country *auberge* (inn) right in the heart of town. Rooms are furnished and styled in individual, unrelated international and travel themes, such as Provence, Tibet, Egypt, Africa, Jules Verne, and Laura Ashley, all to a high standard. The fine in-house seafood restaurant La Truite d'Argent closed in 2004, creating space for more rooms, but there's no shortage of good alternatives on the Marché-aux-Poissons. There's a free airport shuttle to and from Brussels National Airport. Book ahead; the Welcome's regular guests are fiercely loyal.

quai au Bois-à-Brûler 23 (at the Marché-aux-Poissons), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/219-95-46.** Fax 02/217-18-87. www.hotelwelcome.com. 17 units. 95€–130€ ($119–$163) double; 150€ ($188) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ ($13). Métro: Ste-Catherine. **Amenities:** Lounge; Internet desk. *In room:* A/C (some rooms), TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

George V ★ This agreeable little hotel is tucked away in a corner of the city center that looks more down-at-the-heels than it really is and is currently being reborn as a trendy shopping-and-eating area. The George, in a town house from 1859 within easy walking distance of the Grand-Place, provides a free shuttle bus to this square and the main museums, and to Gare du Midi. The rooms are plain but clean and have new furnishings, although some of the fittings are in clear need of replacement.

rue 't Kint 23 (off of place du Jardin-aux-Fleurs), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/513-50-93.** Fax 02/513-44-93. www.george5.com. 16 units. 74€ ($93) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Parking 7.50€ ($9.40). Métro: Bourse. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* TV.

THE UPPER CITY

EXPENSIVE

Astoria ★★ This fine luxury hotel has an ideal location for exploring both the old Brussels of the city center and the newer upper city. You're transported to a more elegant age the moment you walk into the Belle Epoque foyer, where

the sumptuous surroundings feature Corinthian columns, antique furnishings, and textured marble. The Astoria dates from 1909, and its plush interior recalls the panache of that vanished heyday. Rooms, which are somewhat smaller than in other hotels of this category, are attractively and comfortably furnished, though not extravagantly so, in a style that's in keeping with the character of the hotel. You can dine at the beautiful French restaurant Le Palais Royal, and have a drink in the ornate Pullman Bar, which is based on the restaurant car of the legendary Orient Express train.

rue Royale 103 (close to Colonne du Congrès), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **800/SOFITEL** in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/227-05-05. Fax 02/219-30-46. www.sofitel.com. 118 units. 139€–350€ ($174–$438) double (includes buffet breakfast on weekend); from 480€ ($600) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 18€ ($23). Métro: Botanique. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge; health club; spa; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

AROUND AVENUE LOUISE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Conrad Brussels ★★ Big, bright, and fancy, this hotel occupies a prime location on stylish avenue Louise, set back a little from the road. Its architecture is the latest in luxury hotel design, with enough sparkling white marble to restore the Acropolis. The luxuriously furnished, spacious rooms include trouser presses, ice makers, and huge tubs. The French restaurant La Maison du Maître offers all the refinements of haute cuisine; Café Wiltshire maintains a less formal tone.

av. Louise 71 (at place Stéphanie), 1050 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/542-42-42.** Fax 02/542-42-00. www.conrad hotels.com. 269 units. 560€ ($700) double; from 1,450€ ($1,813) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ ($25). Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French, Continental); lounge; cocktail bar; heated indoor pool; health club; spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Bristol Stephanie ★★ Every feature of this sleek Norwegian-owned hotel on one of the city's toniest shopping streets, from its lobby fittings to furnishings in the kitchenette suites, is streamlined, functional, and representative of the best in Nordic design. Some rooms have four-poster beds and "anti-allergy" hardwood floors; all are furnished to a high level of modern style and comfort (though the standard rooms could use a little more Nordic drawer space). The rooms are quite large but should you need more space, it's worth the extra 40€ ($50) or so to upgrade to a far larger executive room. Try to get a room in the main building; the security in the back building is good, but nothing beats a 24-hour doorman. Restaurant Le Chalet d'Odin has a refined French menu, and the breakfast room serves a pretty reasonable American-style buffet breakfast.

av. Louise 91–93, 1050 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/543-33-11.** Fax 02/538-03-07. www.bristol.be. 142 units. 350€–400€ ($438–$500) double; from 630€ ($788) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ ($25). Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Restaurant (international); lounge; bar; heated indoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Stanhope Brussels ★★ An old convent and some recently acquired neighboring properties in the upmarket shopping district around avenue Louise and Porte de Namur have been transformed into this graceful hotel. The ambience of the Stanhope combines that of a country retreat with a prime metropolitan location. All the guest rooms are individually decorated in variations of Old English style. For all the hotel's English image, the in-house restaurant Brighton

Value Getting the Best Deal on Accommodations

- Don't be afraid to ask for a reduction. Hotel prices drop whenever business travelers aren't around. Weekends, holidays, and July to August are the best times to get discounted rooms. More important than tourism in Brussels are visits for conventions, other business, and diplomatic/military (the European Union, NATO headquarters). Bruges is Belgium's big pure-tourism destination. In addition, there's a glut of business-type hotels because all of the big chains want to be represented in the "capital of Europe" for reasons of prestige. Quite often at weekends and in the high summer, rooms are discounted because there are fewer of these types of visitors. Also, Brussels shares to a degree the Paris syndrome, whereby anyone who can evacuates the city in July and August to go on vacation. Needless to say it's a great time to be in Brussels since the place is a lot less busy and a lot more pleasant at this time.
- Note that there are decent medium-price hotels in the streets around the Grand-Place and the three main railway stations, and even in the upmarket neighborhood of avenue Louise.
- When choosing a hotel, find out if breakfast is included in the room rate. This isn't always the case, and some hotels charge a disproportionate price for rolls and coffee.
- You pay less for rooms without a private bathroom. Hallway showers and toilets are usually well maintained, and the price reduction is substantial.
- Youth hostels and youth hotels (both open to all ages) naturally have the cheapest deals of all. Brussels has five of them around the city, and they have all upgraded their facilities in recent years, with more single and double rooms and some private bathrooms. Be aware that if you want to stay at one of the official youth hostels, you can buy an international membership card before leaving home. But you can also pay a nightly surcharge of 2.50€ ($3.15), which after 4 nights makes you a member.

is French, which may not be a typically Old English touch but is certainly tasteful.

rue du Commerce 9 (off of rue du Trône), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/506-91-11.** Fax 02/512-17-08. www.stanhope.be. 95 units. 120€–325€ ($150–$406) double; 625€ ($781) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 10€ ($13). Métro: Trône. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; tearoom; health club; spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar.

MODERATE

Cascade This modern hotel, close to the upmarket shopping around avenue Louise, has well-equipped rooms and four-star service, despite an official three-star classification. Rooms are outfitted with blue carpeting and light pine furnishings, and the colors of the curtains and bedspreads recall a sunset at sea. The hotel doesn't have a restaurant and separate bar (though you can get a drink from an ad hoc bar beside reception), but there are plenty of restaurants and bars in the vicinity. In good weather, breakfast is served on the courtyard terrace.

rue Berckmans 128 (off bd. de Waterloo), 1060 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/538-88-30.** Fax 02/538-92-79. www.cascadehotel.be. 82 units. 90€–160€ ($113–$200) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Métro: Hôtel des Monnaies. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Hotel Agenda Louise ★ This fine small, middle-of-the-road hotel affords a good balance of advantages for both leisure visitors who are looking for modern comforts without spending too much to get them, and for business visitors who don't have sheaves of locked-and-loaded plastic to get by on. The recently renovated, spiffily decorated rooms are in a pleasant though not particularly noteworthy style that encompasses light-colored wood furniture and gold-and-orange curtains and fittings, and have enough room to swing a cat, so long as it's not an overly big one. All have complete kitchens. The bathrooms have tiled walls and floors and just about break out of the shoehorned-in syndrome that afflicts many moderately priced city hotels. Ask for a room that overlooks the inner courtyard for the best view.

rue de Florence 6–8 (off of av. Louise), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/539-00-31.** Fax 02/539-00-63. www.hotel-agenda.com. 37 units. 116€ ($145) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 6€ ($7.50). Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Lounge; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Melia Avenue Louise This gem offers typically English country-house decor, down to the fireplace in the lobby. The spacious, attractively furnished rooms all have private bathrooms, hair dryers, writing desks, and trouser presses. Some have kitchenettes. An English-style buffet breakfast is served in a pleasant and intimate breakfast room—so if you like your ham 'n' eggs done with a touch of class, this could be the place for you.

rue Blanche 4 (off of av. Louise), 1050 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/535-35-00.** Fax 02/535-96-00. www.solmelia.com. 80 units. 130€–260€ ($163–$325) double; 360€ ($450) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Louise. **Amenities:** Bar; sauna. *In room:* TV, kitchenette in some rooms, minibar.

INEXPENSIVE

Hotel De Boeck's *Kids* In a well-maintained 19th-century town house, this graceful hotel has unusually spacious and quiet rooms. They don't quite measure up to the Victorian elegance of the public spaces, but are adequately furnished, with comfortable modern beds, soft carpeting, and floral-pattern curtains. Some rooms, ideal for families and small groups, can be used as quads or even quints.

rue Veydt 40 (off chaussée de Charleroi), 1050 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/537-40-33.** Fax 02/534-40-37. www.hotel-deboecks.be. 46 units. 62€–100€ ($78–$125) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Louise. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Les Bluets ★ *Kids* If you're searching for classic European charm or are a fan of American B&Bs, you'll enjoy it here. In a town house from 1864, the effect is more that of a comfortable country residence than a hotel. You feel as though you're staying with friends when you breakfast in the antiques-filled dining room or in the sunroom. A sweeping stairway (no elevator) leads up to the rooms, several of which have 4m (14-ft.) ceilings and ornate moldings; all have antiques and knickknacks. This is one of the city's few nonsmoking hotels.

rue Berckmans 124 (off av. Louise), 1060 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/534-39-83.** Fax 02/543-09-70. www.geocities.com/les_bluets. 10 units. 68€–81€ ($85–$101) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Hôtel des Monnaies. *In room:* TV.

IN NORTH BRUSSELS

EXPENSIVE

Mercure Grand Hotel Royal Crown ★ This fine luxury hotel has an ideal location for exploring both the old Brussels of the city center and the newer upper city. The public rooms are elegantly modern, with lots of mirrors, marble, and crystal chandeliers. The guest rooms are somewhat smaller than in other hotels of this category, but all are attractively and comfortably furnished.

rue Royale 250 (adjacent to Le Botanique), 1210 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/220-66-11.** Fax 02/217-84-44. www.mercure.com. 314 units. 120€–285€ ($150–$356) double; from 360€ ($450) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ ($25). Métro: Botanique. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); cocktail lounge; exercise room; sauna/solarium; concierge; secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Comfort Art Hotel Siru ★★ This is a fascinating midsize hotel in an area that was formerly decrepit—it used to be a red-light district and still has some peep-show joints and offbeat appliances stores—but has been going upmarket fast since a slew of fancy office blocks were built nearby. What sets the Siru apart is that the owner of this art-gallery-cum-hotel in a redeveloped business district persuaded 130 Belgian artists, including some of the country's biggest names, to "decorate" each of the coolly modern, well-equipped rooms and the corridors with a work on travel. Given the unpredictable nature of reactions to modern art, some clients apparently reserve the same room time after time; others ask for a room change in the middle of the night. It is not easily forgotten.

place Rogier 1 (opposite Gare du Nord), 1210 Bruxelles. ✆ **800/228-3323** in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/203-35-80. Fax 02/203-33-03. www.comforthotelsiru.com. 101 units. 65€–250€ ($81–$313) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ ($19). Métro: Rogier. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Lambermont This modern hotel is a good choice for anyone with a car who doesn't want to drive into the city center but who doesn't want to be out in the boonies. It stands in the somewhat faded Schaerbeek district on a main road leading to the R0 ring road. The rooms are relatively small yet well equipped. You can get to the center easily on the no. 65 or 66 buses, and to avenue Louise for shopping and to the Bruparck recreation area on the no. 23 tram. The hotel's tennis courts are just across boulevard Lambermont.

bd. Lambermont 322 (at Parc Josaphat), 1030 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/242-55-95.** Fax 02/215-36-13. www.lambermont-hotel.com. 43 units. 80€–125€ ($100–$156) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 23. **Amenities:** Lounge; outdoor tennis courts; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV.

Kids Family-Friendly Hotels

Hotel De Boeck's (p. 69) This family favorite near place Louise has huge, well-furnished rooms—they don't necessarily have all the latest amenities, but the whole family can stay in one room in considerable comfort.

Les Bluets (p. 69) The hospitable proprietor of this hotel will make your family feel like members of *her* family.

Tips Booking in a B&B

Brussels has two **bed-and-breakfast** organizations: **Bed & Brussels,** rue Kindermans 9, 1050 Bruxelles (✆ **02/644-07-37;** fax 02/644-01-14; www.bnb-brussels.be); and **Bed & Breakfast Taxistop,** rue du Fossée-aux-Loups 28, 1000 Bruxelles (✆ **070/22-22-92;** fax 02/223-22-32; www.taxistop.be). Both have a database of several hundred rooms, from the simple to the grand.

INEXPENSIVE

Albert *Value* This comfortable, reasonably priced place beside the bronze-domed Eglise Ste-Marie (and close to an enclave of the most authentic Turkish restaurants in town), has clean, bright, modern rooms with a dash of design flair and tiled bathrooms. The five studio apartments at the Résidence Albert, next door, include refrigerators. Although the hotel is on the outer edge of the center, trams from a nearby stop take you straight to the Royal Palace, Royal Museums of Fine Arts, and Sablon antiques district.

rue Royale-Ste-Marie 27–29 (just off place de la Reine), 1030 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/217-93-91.** Fax 02/219-20-17. www.hotelalbert.com. 19 units. 70€–75€ ($88–$94) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 90, 92, 93, or 94. **Amenities:** Lounge. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Sabina This small hostelry is like a private residence, presided over by hospitable owners. A grandfather clock in the reception area and polished wood along the restaurant walls give it a warm, homey atmosphere. Rooms vary in size, but all are comfortable and simply yet tastefully done in modern style with twin beds. Three rooms have kitchenettes.

rue du Nord 78 (at place des Barricades), 1000 Bruxelles. ✆ **02/218-26-37.** Fax 02/219-32-39. www.hotelsabina.be. 24 units. 77€–105€ ($96–$131) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Métro: Madou. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

AIRPORT HOTELS

VERY EXPENSIVE

Sheraton Brussels Airport ★ You can't be more convenient to Brussels National Airport than here without lodging on the runway. You'll find all the comfort you would expect of a top-flight Sheraton, including soundproof rooms with big, comfortable beds. The Concorde restaurant has a French slant complemented by international menu dishes.

Luchthaven Brussel Nationaal (facing Departures), 1930 Zaventem, Belgium. ✆ **800/325-3535** in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/725-10-00. Fax 02/725-11-55. www.sheratonairport.be. 533 units. 275€–335€ ($344–$419) double; from 590€ ($738) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 10€ ($13). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/international); bar; health club; sauna; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

MODERATE

Holiday Inn Express Brussels Airport For a cheaper near-airport option than the Sheraton, try this efficient small place a 5- to 10-minute shuttle ride away. Rooms often are steeply discounted, so always inquire about this. If you get the munchies, you can dine at its big brother Holiday Inn next door. There's free long-term parking and an airport shuttle.

Holidaystraat 7 (access road opposite NATO HQ), 1831 Diegem, Belgium. ✆ **02/720-58-65.** Fax 02/720-41-45. www.brussels-airport.holiday-inn.com. 310 units. 150€–250€ ($188–$313) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV.

4 Where to Dine

The city's French- and Dutch-speaking residents may have their differences, but they both value a good meal. Indeed, food is a passion in Brussels, which boasts more Michelin-star restaurants per head than Paris. People here regard dining as a fine art and their own favorite chef as a grand master. It's just about impossible to eat badly, no matter what price range you're operating within.

The city has no fewer than 1,500 restaurants. You can spend as much as 200€ ($250) for a meal in one of the culinary giants or as little as 15€ ($19) in an informal place for one prepared with maybe as much loving care. Even if you're on a tight budget, you should try to set aside the money for at least one big splurge in a fine restaurant—food for the soul as well as the stomach.

Each year the tourist office issues a comprehensive dining directory entitled ***Gourmet,*** which gives each restaurant's rating in irises, the flower of Brussels, instead of the traditional stars. It's a good idea to pick up a copy at the beginning of your stay in the city.

The Brussels restaurant scene covers the entire city, but there are one or two culinary pockets you should know about. It has been said that you haven't truly visited this city unless you've dined at least once along **rue des Bouchers** or its offshoot, **Petite rue des Bouchers,** both of which are near the Grand-Place (but see the box "On Your Guard in the Ilôt Sacré" later in this chapter). Both streets are lined with an extraordinary array of ethnic eateries, most with a proudly proclaimed specialty and all with modest prices, and some very good Belgian restaurants. Reservations are not usually necessary in these colorful, and often crowded, restaurants—if you cannot be seated at one, you simply stroll on to the next one.

Then there's the cluster of fine restaurants at the **Marché-aux-Poissons (Fish Market),** a short walk from the Grand-Place around place Ste-Catherine. This is where fishermen once unloaded their daily catches from a now-covered canal. Seafood, as you'd expect, is the specialty. A well-spent afternoon's occupation is to stroll through the area to examine the bills of fare exhibited in windows and make your reservation for the evening meal.

In Brussels if you are a nonsmoker, you're mostly out of luck—get ready to consume a garnish of secondhand smoke with your meal. Finally, don't fret if the service is slow: People take their time dining out here.

Note: For the location of the restaurants in this section, see the "Brussels Accommodations & Dining" map on p. 62.

Tips Splashing Out

Brussels is known for its fine food and superb selection of beers. So even if funds are limited, try to splurge on at least one truly splendid meal and spend an evening discovering Belgium's amazing brews in one of the many convivial bars and cafes. Some of the most attractive cafes are right on the Grand-Place, but you pay around 50% more for the privileged location.

RESTAURANTS BY CUISINE

BARBECUE

Mexican Grill Buffet (In South Brussels, $, p. 84)

BELGIAN

Au Vieux Bruxelles (Around avenue Louise, $$, p. 80)
Aux Armes de Bruxelles ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
Brasserie de la Roue d'Or ★★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
Chez Léon (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 77)
De l'Ogenblik ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$, p. 75)
Falstaff Gourmand ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
In 't Spinnekopke ★★ (Around the Fish Market, $$, p. 82)
La Grande Porte ★ (Around avenue Louise, $$, p. 80)
L'Amadeus ★ (Around avenue Louise, $$, p. 80)
La Maison du Cygne ★★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$$, p. 74)
La Mirabelle (Around avenue Louise, $, p. 81)
L'Auberge des Chapeliers ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 77)
Le Mâcon (In South Brussels, $$, p. 84)
Le Marmiton ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
Le Paon Royal (Around the Fish Market, $, p. 82)
Le Scheltema ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$, p. 76)
Le Stévin ★ (In the European District, $$$, p. 83)
Taverne du Passage ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 77)
't Kelderke ★★ (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 78)

FRENCH

Comme Chez Soi ★★★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$$, p. 74)
De l'Ogenblik ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$, p. 75)
Falstaff Gourmand ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
La Maison du Cygne ★★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$$$, p. 74)
La Manufacture ★★ (Around the Fish Market, $$, p. 82)
La Quincaillerie ★★ (Around avenue Louise, $$$, p. 79)
La Table de l'Abbaye ★ (Around avenue Louise, $$$, p. 80)
Le Marmiton ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $$, p. 76)
Le Stévin ★ (In the European District, $$$, p. 83)
Villa Lorraine ★★ (In South Brussels, $$$$, p. 83)

INDIAN

Passage to India (In North Brussels, $$, p. 83)

INTERNATIONAL

La Manufacture ★★ (Around the Fish Market, $$, p. 82)

ITALIAN

Paradiso (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 78)

LIGHT FOOD

Café Métropole ★ (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 77)

MEDITERRANEAN

Le Pain et le Vin ★ (Around avenue Louise, $$, p. 81)

SEAFOOD

Au Vieux Bruxelles (Around avenue Louise, $$, p. 80)
Chez Léon (Around the Grand-Place, $, p. 77)
La Quincaillerie ★★ (Around avenue Louise, $$$, p. 79)

Mexican Grill Buffet (In South Brussels, $, p. 84)
Shanti (Around avenue Louise, $, p. 82)

SWISS
Le Mâcon (In South Brussels, $$, p. 84)

VEGETARIAN
Shanti (Around avenue Louise, $, p. 82)

AROUND THE GRAND-PLACE

VERY EXPENSIVE

Comme Chez Soi CLASSIC FRENCH A pilgrimage to the revered, Art Nouveau "Just Like Home," which sports three Michelin stars, will surely be the culinary highlight of your trip. Although the food is a long way from what most people eat at home, the welcome from master chef Pierre Wynants is warm, and his standards are high enough for the most rigorous tastes. Ask for a table in the kitchen, where you can watch him at work. The menu changes often, but sautéed lobster with truffles and chanterelles, and roast saddle of lamb, are among the kind of main courses you can expect. It's likely easier to enter the kingdom of heaven than to get a seat here, so book as far ahead as possible. If you do land a place, you're sure to agree that heaven can wait. Getting a table at short notice is more likely at lunchtime.

place Rouppe 23 (at av. de Stalingrad). ✆ **02/512-29-21.** www.commechezsoi.be. Reservations required. Main courses 31€–94€ ($39–$118); fixed-price menus 56€–124€ ($70–$155). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–1:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Métro: Anneessens.

La Maison du Cygne BELGIAN/FRENCH This grande dame of Brussels's internationally recognized restaurants has one Michelin star and overlooks the Grand-Place from the former guild house of the Butchers Guild—where Karl Marx worked on *The Communist Manifesto* during a 3-year sojourn in Brussels. The service, though a tad stuffy, is as elegant as the polished walnut walls, bronze wall sconces, and green velvet. The menu has haute cuisine Belgian and French classics, such as *faisan rôti à la Brabançonne, waterzooï de homard* (a souplike lobster stew), veal sautéed with fresh wild mushrooms, and *tournedos* (filet steak) with green peppercorns. There are fine chicken and fish dishes, and specialties such as *huîtres au champagne* (oysters in champagne) and *goujonette de sole mousseline* (sole mousse). Because of its location, the restaurant is usually crowded at lunchtime, but dinner reservations are likely to be available.

Grand-Place 9 (entrance at rue Charles Buls 2). ✆ **02/511-82-44.** www.lamaisonducygne.be. Reservations recommended. Main courses 30€–58€ ($38–$73); *menu du jour* 90€ ($113). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:15pm; Mon–Sat 7pm–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Impressions

One must . . . loiter during long afternoons in the crowded, narrow, sloping streets of the lower town, lunch in the little restaurants in the neighborhood of the Grand-Place . . . and somehow learn to know and appreciate the tang and flavor of the local accent, and, by slow degrees, find one's way into and be accepted by the great heart of the city that is not like any other in the world.

—Brand Whitlock, pre–World War I U.S. ambassador to Belgium

Value Quick Bites

You can find plenty of fast-food outlets where you can grab a bite while you're on the run. Naturally, **McDonald's** is everywhere. However, you might prefer to try **Quick,** the Belgian hamburger chain that's even bigger, locally, than Ronald. Two central locations are rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 103 (✆ **02/511-47-63;** Métro: Gare Centrale) and rue du Fossé-aux-Loups 5 (✆ **02/217-65-11;** Métro: De Brouckère).

Then there are all the **Greek, Turkish,** and **Israeli** places, where you can fill up on moussaka, kabobs, or falafel for as little as 4€ ($5). Try **Chez Munir,** rue du Marché-aux-Fromages 17 (✆ **02/503-33-03;** Métro: Gare Centrale), or **Plaka,** rue du Marché-aux-Fromages 6 (✆ **02/511-21-27;** Métro: Gare Centrale).

Despite its name, **Le Roi du Sandwich,** rue de la Vieille Halle aux Blés 43 (✆ **02/513-31-68;** Métro: Gare Centrale), is not just the "sandwich king," though its sandwiches (like cheese and tomato and prawn salad) are pretty good. It's also a great little Vietnamese snack bar, where a filling *plat du jour* costs just 5€ ($6.25), and the mother and her English-speaking daughter who run the place offer you a second helping at no extra charge.

Another seductive invitation is the aroma of **fresh waffles,** sold from street stands all around the city. Generally thicker than American waffles, they cost about 2€ ($2.50) and are smothered in sugar icing.

And don't forget those Belgian *frites* (fries)! These are twice-fried, giving them a delectably crunchy crust and flavorful interior. Brussels is dotted with dozens of fast-food stands serving *frites* in paper cones. Belgians usually eat them with mayonnaise rather than ketchup; though this method might cause apprehension, don't knock it till you've tried it. Prices run from around 1.80€ to 3€ ($2.25–$3.75). Toppings, such as peanut or curry sauce, cost extra.

EXPENSIVE

De l'Ogenblik ★ FRENCH/BELGIAN In the elegant surroundings of the Galeries Royales St-Hubert, this restaurant supplies good taste in a Parisian bistro-style setting that's popular with off-duty actors and audiences from the nearby Gallery theater, among others. It often gets busy, but the ambience in the split-level, wood-and-brass–outfitted dining room, with a sand-strewn floor, is convivial, though a little too tightly packed when it's full. Look for garlicky meat and seafood menu dishes, and expect to pay a smidgeon more for atmosphere than might be strictly justified by results on the plate. In the former category, if you like duck, try the *magret du canard mulard aux deux poivres, gratin dauphinois* (filet of duck with peppers and potatoes gratin). A good seafood choice is the *ragoût de coquilles St-Jacques et gambas, sauce diable* (scallop and prawn stew in a "devil"—spicy—sauce).

Galerie des Princes 1 (in the Galeries Royales St-Hubert). ✆ **02/511-61-51.** www.ogenblik.be. Main courses 22€–28€ ($28–$35); *plat du jour* 12€ ($15). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 7pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 7pm–12:30am. Métro: De Brouckère.

Le Scheltema BELGIAN This is one of those solid restaurants in the Ilôt Sacré district that keeps going day in, day out, year after year, serving up much the same fare but never forgetting that quality counts. Good service and fine atmosphere complement the seafood specialties at this brasserie-style restaurant, which in some ways is similar to others in the district but always goes the extra mile in terms of class and taste. Pâté, *bisque d'homard* (lobster soup), *croquettes aux crevettes* (prawn croquettes), mussels (when they're in season), and a wide range of fish and meat options all grace the excellent menu.

rue des Dominicains 7 (off rue des Bouchers). ✆ **02/512-20-84.** Main courses 16€–24€ ($20–$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm; Mon–Thurs 6–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 6pm–12:30am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

MODERATE

Aux Armes de Bruxelles TRADITIONAL BELGIAN A Brussels institution—no jokes, please, about who wants to eat in an institution—since it opened in 1921, this family-owned establishment offers gracious, rather formal service, combined with a casual, relaxed ambience. It's an excellent place for your introduction to Belgian cooking, since it combines traditional cuisine with great quality, and offers just about every regional specialty you can think of (including mussels in every conceivable style). You can sample anything from an excellent beef stewed in beer to a delicious *waterzooï* to a steak with pepper-and-cream sauce, all at reasonable prices.

rue des Bouchers 13 (off of the Grand-Place). ✆ **02/511-55-98.** www.auxarmesdebruxelles.be. Main courses 14€–21€ ($18–$26); lunch menu 13€ ($16); *menus du jour* 28€–43€ ($35–$54). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–11:15pm. Métro: De Brouckère.

Brasserie de la Roue d'Or TRADITIONAL BELGIAN This welcoming Art Nouveau brasserie with lots of dark wood, mirrors, a high, frescoed ceiling, Magritte images on the walls, and marble-topped tables has a loyal local following. An extensive menu, ranging from grilled meats to a good selection of cooked salmon and other seafood, as well as old Belgian favorites like *stoemp* (mashed potatoes and carrots with sausage, a steak, or other meat), caters to just about any appetite, and the beer, wine, and spirits list is equally long. Jeff De Gelas, the colorful owner (he also owns **'t Kelderke;** see below), is known locally as the "King of Stoemp."

rue des Chapeliers 26 (off of the Grand-Place). ✆ **02/514-25-54.** Main courses 13€–23€ ($16–$29); fixed-price menus 23€–28€ ($29–$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–12:30am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Falstaff Gourmand *Value* BELGIAN/FRENCH Le Falstaff cafe across from the Bourse (see "Brussels After Dark" in chapter 4) is widely renowned as a classic Art Nouveau cafe. Around the corner, its former sister establishment—now operating on its own hook—has a different but equally notable style. Service is attentive, prompt, and friendly. First-class Belgian and French menu dishes include one of the best deals in Brussels: a three-course *menu gourmand,* which includes an aperitif, glass of wine with the starter, and small pitcher of wine with the main course.

rue des Pierres 38 (near the Bourse). ✆ **02/512-17-61.** Main courses 14€–21€ ($18–$26); *menu gourmand* 30€ ($38). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–3pm; Tues–Sun 7–11pm. Métro: Bourse.

Le Marmiton BELGIAN/FRENCH A welcoming environment, hearty servings, and commitment to satisfying customers are hallmarks at this cozy restaurant, now on two floors. On a menu that emphasizes fish, the seafood cocktail starter is a heap of shellfish and crustaceans substantial enough to be a main course, and the sole is excellent. Meat dishes are available, too. The menu

Tips False Friend

Watch out for *steak Américain,* which might sound like a nice, big, mouthwateringly juicy American-style steak, but which is in fact raw chopped beef!

is complemented by an excellent wine list selected by Portuguese/Belgian owner and chef Antonio Beja da Silva, whose love of his own cooking shows in his waistline, and in the attention he devotes to his customers.

rue des Bouchers 43 (off Grand-Place). ✆ **02/511-79-10.** Main courses 12€–18€ ($15–$23); *menus du jour* 9.90€–21€ ($12–$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–11:30pm (12:30am weekends). Métro: Gare Centrale.

Taverne du Passage BELGIAN Located in the city's most elegant shopping gallery, this stylish brasserie offers a wide variety of seafood and, this being Brussels, mussels. Among the house specialties on the menu, the *waterzooï* (fish or chicken stew) and the *choucroute* (sauerkraut) are also available for takeout, but then you'd miss out on the restaurant's sleek Art Deco interior replete with dark wood, mirrors, and ceiling fans. The white-jacketed waiters are friendly and efficient as they scurry up and down the long rows of tables.

Galerie de la Reine 30 (in the Galeries Royales St-Hubert). ✆ **02/512-37-32.** Main courses 15€–]20€ ($19–$25); *plat du jour* 12€ ($15). AE, DC, MC V. Daily noon–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

INEXPENSIVE

Café Métropole LIGHT FOOD Many Brussels visitors never get beyond the pleasant heated sidewalk section of this massive Victorian-style cafe. Inside you find a casually elegant decor, highlighted by a marble fireplace, colorful wooden puppets hung from the high ceilings, and comfortable leather seating arranged in cozy groupings. The menu includes sandwiches, soups, quiches, and other light meals. The bar menu fills no fewer than six pages, including some rather exceptional specialties from the head barman.

In the Hôtel Métropole, place de Brouckère 31. ✆ **02/217-23-00.** Reservations not accepted. *Plat du jour* 9€ ($11); light meal 9€–13€ ($11–$16). AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–2am. Métro: De Brouckère.

Chez Léon BELGIAN/SEAFOOD Think of it as the mussels from Brussels, as this big, basic restaurant is the city's most famous purveyor of that marine delicacy. Léon has been flexing its mussels since 1893 and now has clones all over Belgium (including one at the Bruparck amusements complex; see chapter 4). The mollusks in question are top quality, at low prices, in a variety of styles, such as *moules marinières* (mussels boiled in vegetable stock) and *moules au vin blanc* (mussels in white-wine sauce). If you don't like mussels, there are plenty of other fishy delights—like eels in green sauce, cod, and bouillabaisse.

rue des Bouchers 18 (off of Grand-Place). ✆ **02/511-14-15.** www.chezleon.be. Main courses 9.40€–22€ ($12–$28); *menu Formule Léon* 12€ ($15). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat noon–11:30pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

L'Auberge des Chapeliers *Value* TRADITIONAL BELGIAN In a 17th-century building that was once the headquarters of the hat-makers' guild, the Auberge des Chapeliers preserves its historic charm. Behind a beautiful brick facade, the first two floors are graced with timber beams and paneling and connected by a narrow wooden staircase. Popular with locals who live and work in the area, as well as with tourists fortunate enough to find it, it can be crowded

On Your Guard in the Ilôt Sacré

Opinion in Brussels differs on how acceptable it is to be seen eating in the popular Ilôt Sacré (Holy Islet) restaurant district, just off the Grand-Place, around rue des Bouchers and Petite rue des Bouchers. Some commentators snootily dismiss the entire area as a tourist trap. Others snootily dismiss this dismissal and pile in alongside the tourists. So who's right?

My advice is not to waste time listening to the argument but to go see for yourself. Ilôt Sacré restaurants represent a veritable United Nations of cuisine. Some of the city's best Belgian restaurants are here, and some of the worst. But the ambience is invariably romantic, whether on a warm summer evening at a sidewalk table with lanterns and candles all around; or on a cold winter evening in a cozy room with wood and brass in abundance.

A few restaurants take advantage of tourists. They figure that tomorrow you'll be on a plane, and if they rip you off in the meantime, who cares? All the restaurants listed in this chapter are good ones, and you should have no problems in them. If you prefer the look of another, though, here are the ground rules:

- A big outdoor display of seafood on ice is no guarantee of quality. It might mean the reverse.
- Be wary if the waiter hits on you before you have a decent chance to study the menu; be more wary if inexpensive menu items, such as the

at the height of lunch hour, so it's a good idea to come just before noon or just after 2pm. The food is typical hearty Belgian fare, with an accent on mussels in season and dishes cooked in beer. The prices are modest considering the location.

rue des Chapeliers 1–3 (off of Grand-Place). ✆ **02/513-73-38.** Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 9.50€–18€ ($12–$23); set-price menus 15€–21€ ($19–$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm; Sat–Sun noon–3pm; Sun–Thurs 6–11pm; Fri–Sat 6pm–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Paradiso ITALIAN This great little Italian restaurant is close enough to the Grand-Place to be convenient, but just far enough away to not be immediately obvious to the crowds. As such, it is one of Brussels's best-kept secrets. Owner/chef Santino Trovato has created a little gem, with pasta and pizza just like mamma used to make and a list of fine Italian wines as long as your arm.

rue Duquesnoy 34 (off place St-Jean). ✆ **02/512-52-32.** Main courses 8.50€–14€ ($11–$18). No credit cards. Tues–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sun 6:30pm–midnight. Métro: Gare Centrale.

't Kelderke ★★ TRADITIONAL BELGIAN Despite being on the square that is the focus of tourism in Brussels, this is far from being a tourist trap. As many Bruxellois as tourists throng the long wooden tables in a 17th-century, brick-arched cellar, and all are welcomed with time-honored respect, even if that should be perceived as being a little rough and ready. Memorable traditional Belgian fare, with little in the way of frills, is served up from an open kitchen. This is a great place to try local specialties such as *bloedpens* (blood sausage) a la Bruxelloise, *stoemp* (mashed potato and vegetable) with *boudin*

plat du jour (dish of the day), are "sold out"; and be warier still if the waiter offers to "propose you something special" instead. There's a story circulating of two Americans who paid 300€ ($375) for a "special" lunch—you don't want this to be you.

- Be certain of the price of everything you order by checking on a printed menu or chalkboard.
- Check the price of the house wine. This is usually the cheapest wine—but in a few places it is by far the most expensive! The same consideration applies to the house aperitif.
- If you order a seafood platter without checking the price, you may get one big enough to feed Patton's Third Army, with a price tag to match—this is at least better than getting one more suitable for a doll's house yet still with a mammoth price tag.
- Check your bill carefully and politely refuse to pay for anything you didn't order or didn't get. The manager may then mention the magic word "police." Stand (or sit) your ground—calmly. The cops know all about the antics some of these places pull.

None of the above is meant to discourage you. Plenty of visitors come away from the Ilôt Sacré with no more serious complaint than an expanded waistline. But the unwary do get ripped off. It happens all the time.

(sausage)—owner Jef De Gelas is renowned locally as the "King of Stoemp"—*carbonnades à la flamande* (Flemish beef stew), *lapin à la gueuze* (rabbit in Brussels beer), and big, steaming pans piled high with Zeeland mussels.

Grand-Place 15. ✆ **02/513-73-44.** Main courses 9.50€–19€ ($12–$24); *plat du jour* 8.50€ ($11). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2am. Métro: Gare Centrale.

AROUND AVENUE LOUISE

EXPENSIVE

La Quincaillerie ★★ MODERN FRENCH/SEAFOOD In the Ixelles district, where fine restaurants are as common as streetlights, this spot stands out, even though it may be a little too aware of its own modish good looks and a shade pricey. The setting is a traditional former hardware store from 1903, with a giant rail station clock, wood paneling, and masses of wooden drawers, designed by students of Art Nouveau master Victor Horta. It's busy enough to get the waitstaff harassed and absent-minded, yet they're always friendly. Seafood dishes predominate on the menu. Specialties include *escalope du saumon rôti au gros sel* (salmon in roasted rock salt) and *canette laquée au miel et citron vert* (baby duck with a crust of honey and lime). You don't need to look much further than a crisp Sancerre as the ideal wine accompaniment to most dishes.

rue du Page 45 (at rue Américaine). ✆ **02/533-98-33.** www.quincaillerie.be. Main courses 17€–26€ ($21–$33); fixed-price menus 23€–26€ ($29–$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; daily 7pm–midnight. Tram: 81, 82, 91, or 92 to chaussée de Charleroi.

La Table de l'Abbaye ★ FRENCH This is a restaurant for the French-cuisine enthusiast who likes things done just so and is not too enamored of nouvelle cuisine. The setting is a well-appointed town house near the tranquil grounds of the Abbaye (Abbey) de la Cambre. The food here is hard to beat and its prices are not excessive, considering the quality of the fare and its presentation. Look for many French favorites, all best accompanied with a fine wine—from France, of course. Lobster flexes its claws in several interesting ways on the menu here: in pancakes with caviar butter, in a mixed salad, and with a pepper-cream sauce. Lamb marinated in Bourgogne wine is another specialty. In a romantically atmospheric touch, candlelight provides the main illumination for the classic decor, enlivened by sculptures and paintings.

rue de Belle-Vue 62. ✆ **02/646-33-95.** Main courses 15€–25€ ($19–$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4:30pm and 7–11pm. Closed Dec 20–30. Tram: 93 or 94 (to top of av. Louise).

MODERATE

Au Vieux Bruxelles BELGIAN/SEAFOOD This convivial, brasserie-style restaurant from 1882 specializes in mussels, which it serves in a wide variety of ways. In Belgium the personality of the humble but tasty mussel is a staple of conversation as much as of diet, and people assess the quality of each year's crop with the same critical eye that some other countries reserve for fine wines (the fact that the mussels all come from neighboring Holland adds a sharper point to their critical faculties). Au Vieux Bruxelles, a kind of temple to the Belgian obsession with mussels, serves the shellfish in 15 different ways, including raw (accompanied only by a light white-wine sauce), baked, fried, grilled, and broiled, as well as in traditional dishes like *moules marinières* (boiled in water with vegetables) and *moules au vin* (boiled in wine). Should you not wish to do some work on the mussels, you can get great steaks, like the *steak au poivre flambé* (flamed pepper steak), escargots (snails), and crepes (pancakes).

rue St-Boniface 35 (close to Porte Namur). ✆ **02/503-31-11.** www.auvieuxbruxelles.com. Reservations not accepted. Main courses 9€–18€ ($11–$23). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–2:30pm and 6:30–11pm. Métro: Porte de Namur.

La Grande Porte ★ TRADITIONAL BELGIAN It's hard to think of a Brussels eatery that is more traditional Belgian than this archetypal place in the down-at-the-heels Marolles district. Dark-wood furnishings, paper lanterns, marionettes hanging from the ceiling, old posters, and fashionably shabby walls, the whole suffused with the sounds of canned French cabaret, combine to create a cozy, convivial dining space. The mostly regional main courses are served in bountiful portions. Sure to impart a warm glow of appreciation are hearty standards like the *carbonnades à la flamande* (beef braised in beer), *ballekes* (meatballs), *waterzooï à la Gantoise* (chicken stew), *jambonneau* (pig's knuckle) *pot-au-feu,* and *stoemp* (mashed potatoes and carrots) with sausage. But a touch of bistro-level sophistication in dishes such as the chicory and smoked salmon and the warm-goat's-cheese salad starters lifts the menu out of the plain class. The late-night open hours are an additional plus.

rue Notre-Seigneur 9 (off of rue Blaes). ✆ **02/512-89-98.** Main courses 11€–14€ ($14–$18). V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6pm–2am. Bus: 20 or 48.

L'Amadeus ★ MODERN BELGIAN The postmodern chic of this restaurant/wine bar/oyster bar in a former sculptor's studio with garden-courtyard terrace makes a refreshing change from traditional Belgian style. Its candlelit interior is so dim you would think they're hiding something, but the cooking is

Value Getting the Best Deal on Dining

- Take advantage of the *plat du jour* at lunch and one of the set menus at dinner for good food at a bargain rate.
- Venture into one of the simple Greek places near Gare du Midi, where there's no menu and you go to the kitchen to point out the dishes you want. You can pig out for around 8€ ($10).
- Remember that many neighborhood bars serve basic meals like soup, steak and french fries, and spaghetti Bolognese—bland, but better with a dash of Tabasco—at low prices.
- Fill up on inexpensive and delicious Belgian *frites,* which we mistakenly call french fries (see "Quick Bites" above). You won't be the first tourist who has done Europe by potato express.
- Be aware that some of the most expensive hotels serve a modestly priced Sunday brunch. At the **Conrad,** av. Louise 71 (✆ **02/542-42-42;** Métro: Louise), for example, you can raid a lavish buffet for 25€ ($31).

nothing to be ashamed of. The menu includes such vegetarian treats as vegetarian lasagna and ricotta-and-spinach tortellini, and for meat eaters, caramelized spareribs and several salmon dishes, all accompanied by delicious homemade nut bread. The Sunday brunch is an all-you-can-eat affair that includes smoked fish, cheese, eggs, bread, cereal, juice, and coffee.

rue Veydt 13 (off chaussée de Charleroi). ✆ **02/538-34-27.** Main courses 15€–23€ ($19–$29); *plat du jour* (Mon–Fri) 9.50€ ($12); Sun brunch 18€ ($23). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:30pm; daily 7pm–1am. Tram: 91 or 92.

Le Pain et le Vin ★ MEDITERRANEAN The owners of this restaurant were once steeped in the Michelin-star milieu but now have decided to jettison the rigorously controlled bag-and-baggage of that system and concentrate on having some good, clean, tasty fun instead. "Bread and Wine" fits the bill perfectly—and the bill won't be excessive either. The restaurant, in a converted house, looks out onto a garden. There's a terrace for alfresco dining in good weather. Whether the dish is chicken, fish, meat, or vegetables, the preparation concentrates on bringing out the natural taste, rather than smothering it with over-rich sauces. For interesting variations on common dishes, try the chicken ravioli with basil and Parmesan, or the lobster-and-shrimp lasagna with ginger sauce. Vegetarian dishes are available on request, and vegetables form a big part of the menu offerings.

chaussée d'Alsemberg 812A. ✆ **02/332-37-74.** Main courses 12€–16€ ($15–$20). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm. Tram: 55.

INEXPENSIVE

La Mirabelle TRADITIONAL BELGIAN This brasserie-restaurant in Ixelles is popular both with students from the nearby Free University of Brussels for its "democratic" prices, and with Bruxellois in general for its convivial atmosphere and consistently good food. Plainly decorated, with wooden tables crowded together, the Mirabelle looks more like a bar than a restaurant and often has a boisterous pub-style atmosphere to match. The *steak-frites* (steak

with french fries), a Belgian staple, is particularly good here. The garden terrace is good for alfresco dining in summer.

chaussée de Boondael 459. ✆ **02/649-51-73.** Main courses 8€–14€ ($10–$18); *plat du jour* 9.90€ ($12). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6pm–2:45am. Tram: 23 or 90.

Shanti ★ VEGETARIAN/SEAFOOD An exotic look keeps faith with its multicultural menus: lots of greenery and flowers create a gardenlike feel, and crystal lamps, mirrors, and old paintings adorn the walls. Try "Neptune's pleasure," crab with avocado and seaweed, as a starter. For a main course, shrimp masala with mixed vegetables and coriander is excellent, as is eggplant with ricotta in a tomato-and-basil sauce. There is a big choice of menus.

av. Adolphe Buyl 68. ✆ **02/649-40-96.** Main courses 8€–13€ ($10–$16); fixed-price menus 22€–25€ ($28–$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–10pm. Tram: 92 or 93.

AROUND THE FISH MARKET

The colorful and atmospheric Marché-aux-Poissons, beside the now-vanished harbor in the heart of Brussels, where fishing boats used to moor, has a plethora of fine seafood restaurants.

MODERATE

In 't Spinnekopke ★★ *Finds* TRADITIONAL BELGIAN "In the Spider's Web" occupies a stagecoach inn from 1762, just far enough off the beaten track downtown to be frequented mainly by "those in the know." You dine in a tilting, tiled-floor building, at plain tables, and more likely than not squeezed into a tight space. This is one of Brussels's most traditional cafe/restaurants—so much so, in fact, that the menu lists its hardy standbys of regional Belgian cuisine in the old Bruxellois dialect. *Stoemp mi sossisse* is hotchpotch with sausage and *toung ave mei* is sole. The bar stocks a vast selection of traditional beers.

place du Jardin-aux-Fleurs 1 (off rue Van Artevelde). ✆ **02/511-86-95.** Main courses 11€–20€ ($14–$25); *plat du jour* 9€ ($11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 6–11pm; Sat 6pm–midnight (bar Mon–Fri 11am–midnight; Sat 6pm–midnight). Métro: Bourse.

La Manufacture ★★ FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL Even in its former incarnation, this place was concerned with style—it used to be the factory of chic Belgian leather-goods maker Delvaux. Fully refurbished, with hardwood floors, leather banquettes, polished wood, and stone tables, all set amid iron pillars and exposed air ducts, it produces trendy world cuisine on a French foundation, for a mostly youthful public. You may find it a little disconcerting at first, being able to mix Asian menu dishes like dim sum and sushi with Moroccan couscous, Lyon sausage, sliced ostrich filets with mango and green pepper, and Belgian specialties like *waterzooï,* but you soon get the hang of it (the menu changes seasonally, so these particular dishes might not be available when you visit). Some evenings there's live piano music. On sunny days in summer, you can dine outdoors on a terrace shaded by giant bamboo plants.

rue Notre-Dame du Sommeil 12–20 (off of place du Jardin-aux-Fleurs). ✆ **02/502-25-25.** www.manufacture.be. Main courses 12€–19€ ($15–$25); *menu du jour* (lunch only) 14€ ($18); fixed-price menus 30€–65€ ($38–$81). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2pm and 7–11pm; Sat 7pm–midnight. Métro: Bourse.

INEXPENSIVE

Le Paon Royal BELGIAN One of my favorite small, family-owned restaurants, this one's a typically Bruxellois treat, in a house dating from 1631 that has a rustic wood-and-exposed-brick interior and timber-beamed ceiling. You can have just a snack with one of the 65 brands of beer, 6 of them draught beers, behind the tiny bar (some of which are also used in the cooking) or try the

hearty *plat du jour,* which is invariably a traditional Belgian dish, offered at lunchtime only. Specialties of the house are roast suckling pig in a mustard sauce, and cod filet in a *Hoegaarden* (Belgian white beer) sauce. In fine weather, chairs are generally set out under a cluster of plane trees in a little park just across the street.

rue du Vieux Marché-aux-Grains 6. ✆ **02/513-08-68.** www.paonroyal.com. Main courses 8.95€–18€ ($11–$23); *plat du jour* 7.90€ ($10). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–9:30pm. Métro: Ste-Catherine.

IN THE EUROPEAN DISTRICT

EXPENSIVE

Le Stévin ★ BELGIAN/FRENCH Should you be experiencing an uncontrollable desire to rub shoulders with the European Union's politicos and bureaucrats—including an occasional august commissioner or government minister from an E.U. member state—this tranquil town house is a likely place. True, that's not much of a recommendation, but fine food can make all the difference. Belgian specialties are prepared in a light, modern way that makes a pleasant change from the weight-bound portions usual in traditional Belgian eateries. You can take a pre-meal drink at an Art Deco bar, and in fine weather dine alfresco in a garden at the back. The traditional wood-paneled setting features antique furnishings and old pictures of Brussels. Popular dishes here are sole, red mullet, and grilled or roast lamb. Wild mushrooms make a nice accompaniment for any of these meat and fish dishes.

rue St-Quentin 29 (off of Sq. Ambiorix). ✆ **02/230-98-47.** Main courses 18€–25€ ($23–$31); fixed-price lunch 20€–25€ ($25–$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 7–11:30pm. Métro: Schuman.

IN NORTH BRUSSELS

MODERATE

Passage to India INDIAN In an enclave of Indian and Pakistani restaurants, Passage to India stands out for its friendly welcome, warm ambience, and unpretentious yet careful presentation. The decor is bright but restrained, and in the evenings little oil lamps illuminate the room to almost magical effect. Prawn *puri* is a particularly good starter here. Tandoori (cooked in the clay oven), curry, and *dhansak* (Persian-style) dishes predominate on the main-course menu. Most are mild to medium in terms of spiciness. If you like it hotter, ask for *Madras* dishes; and for hotter still, *vindaloo.* Kashmiri dishes are a light and fruity option for those who don't want so many spices, while *pasanda* dishes, made with red wine, provide a more rounded flavor. Adventurous diners can ask about special Bangladeshi fish dishes.

Chaussée de Louvain 223. ✆ **02/735-31-47.** Main courses 9.50€–19€ ($12–$23); *menu du jour* 9.50€ ($12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 7pm–midnight. Bus: 29.

IN SOUTH BRUSSELS

VERY EXPENSIVE

Villa Lorraine ★★ TRADITIONAL FRENCH You'll find one of the city's top kitchens in this renovated château on the fringes of the Bois de la Cambre park. The dining rooms are spacious, with wicker furnishings, flower arrangements everywhere, and a skylight. In good weather you may elect to have drinks outside under the trees. Among the classic French offerings are saddle of lamb in a delicate red-wine-and-herb sauce, cold salmon in an herb sauce, partridge cooked with apples, and baked lobster with butter rose.

av. du Vivier d'Oie 75. ✆ **02/374-31-63.** Main courses 27€–45€ ($34–$56); fixed-price lunch menu 50€ ($63); *menu gastronomique* 75€–120€ ($94–$150). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm and 7–9:30pm. Closed 3 weeks in July. Going by car or taxi is the most practical way to get here.

MODERATE

Le Mâcon BELGIAN/SWISS Tasty, uncomplicated Belgian fare, such as *moules* (mussels) and *steak-frites* (steak with french fries), is this superior neighborhood cafe-restaurant's stock in trade. The extensive menu also has slightly more exotic items—try the tournedos Rossini in port sauce, and skate *au beurre noir* (in black butter). Service is simple, and the cozy, wood-paneled dining area is a style-free zone (smoky too), but there are a few tables with tablecloths, usually kept for regulars unless you ask for one. A Swiss menu, including fondue, is served every Thursday.

rue Joseph Stallaert 87 (off av. Winston Churchill). ✆ **02/343-89-37.** Main courses 6.50€–20€ ($8.15–$25); fixed-price menus 9.50€–25€ ($12–$31); Swiss menu 21€ ($26). No credit cards. Daily noon–dawn. Tram: 23 or 90.

INEXPENSIVE

Mexican Grill Buffet *Value* *Kids* SEAFOOD/BARBECUE For the most amazing deal, it's worth taking a tram out to this unpretentious restaurant on the old Waterloo road. In the classic tradition of Belgian nuttiness, the Mexican Grill has absolutely no Mexican food. Instead, you can take limitless helpings from a vast buffet stocked with oysters, crab claws, and much more. There's also meat you can barbecue to your personal taste and an unending supply of beer and wine. Kids love the help-yourself ice cream bar.

chaussée de Waterloo 782 (at Bois de la Cambre). ✆ **02/375-41-44.** All you can eat and drink: 25€ ($31) adults, 2.50€ ($3.15) children 7–12, free for children under 7. MC, V. Mon–Sat 6–11:30pm; Sun noon–midnight. Tram: 23 or 90.

SPECIALTY DINING

Coffee hounds who are missing their favorite beans should find them at specialist **Corica,** Marché-aux-Poulets 49 (✆ **02/511-88-52;** Métro: Bourse), where two dozen delectable blends from around the world stand in a line. You can soak up caffeine to your heart's content at one counter and stock up on the raw material at another. Breathing in the aroma of roasting coffee beans is alone a reason for visiting. Corica is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 6pm.

Rick's Café Américain, av. Louise 344 (✆ **02/647-35-50;** tram: 93 or 94), serves a great American breakfast of eggs, bacon, mushrooms, tomatoes, and hash browns. **Le Pain Quotidien,** rue de la Croix de Fer 53 (✆ **02/512-60-63;** tram: 92, 93, or 94), is another good place for breakfast, with fine coffee and home-baked bread.

PICNICKING

You'll find a large **GB** supermarket, with an extensive cold-cut-and-cheese counter perfect for assembling a picnic lunch, in the basement of the City 2 mall on rue Neuve (Métro: Rogier). It's open Monday to Saturday 9am to 8pm (to 9pm Fri). An equally large and well-stocked **Delhaize** supermarket is at the

Tips A Perfect Brew

Belgian beer is the perfect accompaniment to your meal. The country is renowned for its 450 brands of beer produced by dozens of breweries. Belgium's chefs use beer in their sauces the way French chefs use wine. Beef, chicken, and fish are often bathed in a savory sauce based on the local Brussels *gueuze, faro,* and *kriek* brews.

corner of rue du Marché-aux-Poulets and boulevard Anspach, diagonally across from the Bourse (Métro: Bourse). Both GB and Delhaize have an extensive range of modestly priced good wines.

But you could do instead what many Belgians do and purchase one of the country's 450 or so brands of beer, many of which are craft beers made by local and regional brewers (though equally many are produced by the big Interbrew firm whose flagship beer is Stella Artois). If you have a way to get and keep it cool, I recommend the fresh-tasting, cloudy Hoegaarden *blanche* (white) beer, or *witbier* as it's called in the Flanders region where it originates. Or just pick up some ordinary Pilseners, like Stella, Maes, or Jupiler.

You can find ample specialist food stores in the streets around the Grand-Place. The best city-center spot for a picnic is the **Parc de Bruxelles,** which extends in front of the Palais Royal (see "Parks & Gardens" in chapter 4).

4

Exploring Brussels

Brussels has such a variety of things to see and do that it can sometimes be overwhelming. There are more than 75 museums dedicated to just about every special interest under the sun, in addition to impressive public buildings, leafy parks, and interesting squares. History is just around every corner. Fortunately, numerous sidewalk cafes offer respite for weary feet, and there's good public transport to those attractions beyond walking distance of the compact, heart-shaped city center, which contains many of Brussels's most popular attractions.

Your very first stop should be at the **Brussels International Tourism** office in the Town Hall in Grand-Place to pick up its comprehensive guidebook and city map. The helpful guide is a gold mine of information regarding both tourist sights and the practicalities of your stay in the city. If your visit is a short one, you may want to engage one of its multilingual guides, available at very reasonable rates, to make the best use of your time.

See individual listing descriptions for details on reduced admission.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

You could easily spend a busy week doing Brussels justice. Even then you need to divide it into natural zones so that you aren't jumping around all over the place. My own preference is for three major zones, each of which ideally requires a day.

If You Have 1 Day

First up is the Grand-Place area, with a strong focus on the beautiful square itself. Visit the 15th-century Hôtel de Ville and the Musée de la Ville, and view the decorated facades of the square's elegant guild houses. Squeeze in a pilgrimage to the nearby *Manneken-Pis* statue before returning to the Grand-Place for lunch at the convivial restaurant 't Kelderke. Shop (or window-shop) at the graceful 19th-century Galeries Royales St-Hubert, an early shopping mall, on the way to the Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule. End with the adventures of comic-book heroes at the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée. Between times, if you can fit in one or more of them, there's the Bourse, the Mont des Arts, and the restored place des Martyrs. After a dinner that should include mussels, in season, at a traditional eatery in the nearby Ilôt Sacré restaurant district, spend the evening checking out one or more of the city's famed cafes, or take in an opera or dance performance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie.

If You Have 2 Days

On the second day, explore the "Royal Road" that runs through the Haute Ville on rue Royale and rue de la Régence. Along the way, you'll pass by the Jardin Botanique, and the Belgian Parliament, housed in the Palais de la Nation. Take a look at the neoclassical harmony of place Royale, the elegant Palais Royal and the Palais des Beaux-Arts, and the adjacent Parc de Bruxelles. After

Tips Agenda for Youth

Be sure to take advantage of the free admission some museums offer on the first Wednesday afternoon every month.

lunch, view Belgian art masterpieces by Brueghel and Rubens at the Musée d'Art Ancien, and by Magritte and Delvaux at the Musée d'Art Moderne next door (together they form the nation's premier art collection: the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts). Then, move on to the two Sablon squares. Buy a bag of handmade Belgian pralines at Wittamer on place du Grand-Sablon, and browse the antiques stores around the square. Stroll through the 15th-century church of Notre-Dame du Sablon before heading over to tranquil place du Petit-Sablon for a rest. Finish up with a close look—but better hope it's not *too* close—at the Palais de Justice.

If You Have 3 Days

On the third day, get up early and check out the steals at the Vieux-Marché flea market on place du Jeu-de-Balle in the Marolles district. Then, head out from the center to Bruparck, an attractions park on the northern edge of the city, that includes Mini-Europe and the Océade water leisure center. Nearby are the giant spheres of the Atomium and a panoramic view of the city from its viewing deck. Just south of here is the Laeken district, an area replete with sights associated with Belgium's royal family. Take in the Royal Greenhouses, the Chinese Pavilion, the Japanese Tower, and the church of Notre-Dame de Laeken, where the royal family has its mausoleum. Return to earth by having dinner in one of the guild hall restaurants, like La Maison du Cygne, that overlook the Grand-Place.

If You Have 4 Days or More

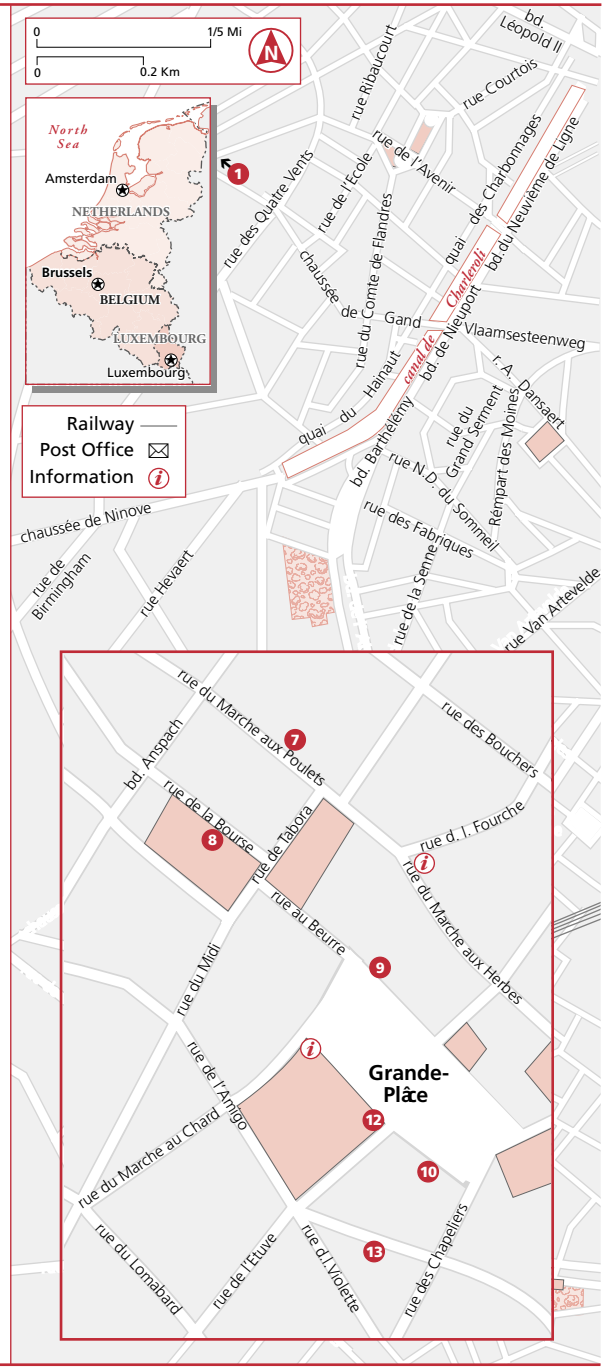
On day 4 compare the old and the new by spending the morning in the city's most ancient quarter, around place Ste-Catherine and the Marché-aux-Poissons, and the afternoon at the Parc du Cinquantenaire and the ultramodern European District. On day 5 head out of town to critique Napoleon's generalship at the Waterloo battlefield, south of Brussels. If military history isn't your thing, visit instead the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren. Or explore instead Brussels's Art Nouveau architectural heritage by visiting the Musée Horta, and by strolling the side streets off avenue Louise and Porte de Namur, and around Square Ambiorix. If you have time left, look into edge-of-town or out-of-town places such as the Bois de la Cambre, Genval, Beersel Castle, or the National Botanical Gardens at Meise. A little more time brings nearby towns and places of interest like Mechelen, Leuven, and Villers-la-Ville within reach.

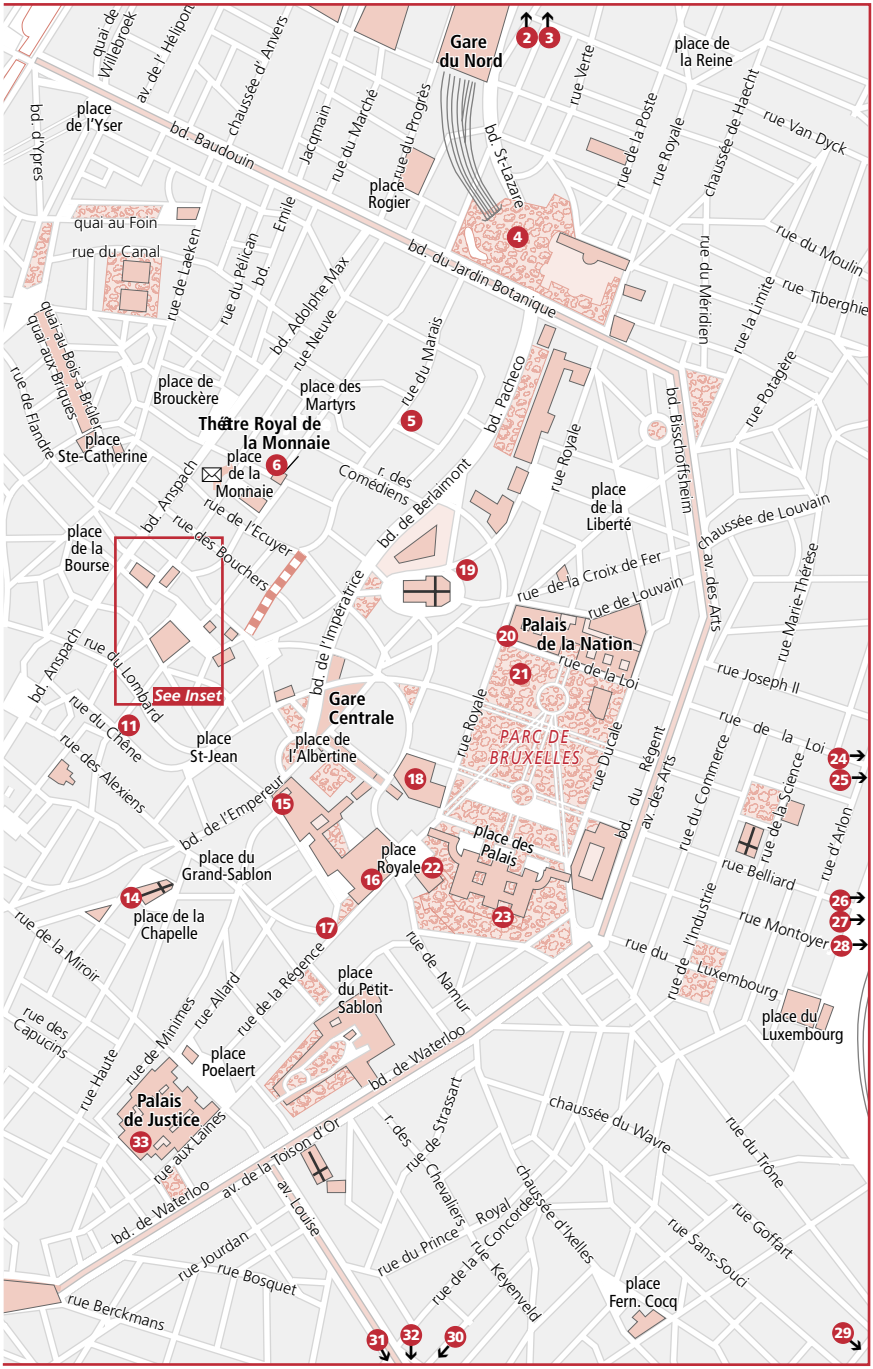
1 The Grand-Place ★★★

Ornamental gables, medieval banners, gilded facades, sunlight flashing off gold-filigreed rooftop sculptures, a general impression of harmony and timelessness—there's a lot to take in all at once when you first enter the **Grand-Place** (Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse), which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. You could translate this into English as "Big Square" or "Main Square" or something

Brussels Attractions

- Albert I Royal Library **15**
- Atomium **3**
- Autoworld **25**
- Belgian Center for Comic-Strip Art **5**
- Bois de la Cambre **31**
- Bourse **8**
- Brewery Museum **10**
- Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule **19**
- Children's Museum **28**
- Eglise Notre Dame du Sablon **17**
- Eglise St-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg **22**
- Eglise St-Nicholas **7**
- Forêt de Soignes **30**
- Le Jardin Botanique **4**
- Manneken-Pis **11**
- Mini-Europe **2**
- Musée de la Ville **9**
- Musée du Cinquantenaire **24**
- Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle **13**
- Musée Horta **32**
- Musée René Magritte **1**
- Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts **16**
- Notre Dame de la Chapelle **14**
- Palais des Beaux-Arts (Bozar) **18**
- Palais de Justice **33**
- Palais de la Nation **20**
- Palais Royal **23**
- Parc de Bruxelles **21**
- Royal Museum of Central Africa **26**
- Royal Natural Science Institute Museum **27**
- Walibi Belgium **29**
- Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie **6**
- Town Hall (Hotel de Ville) **13**




Gare du Nord
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place de l'Yser
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av. de l'Héliport
bd. d'Ypres
bd. Baudouin
chaussée d'Anvers
Jacqmain
rue du Marché
rue du Progrès
place Rogier
bd. St-Lazare
rue Verte
rue de la Poste
rue Royale
chaussée de Haecht
rue Van Dyck
quai au Foin
rue du Canal
rue de Laeken
rue du Pélican
bd. Emile
bd. Adolphe Max
rue Neuve
bd. du Jardin Botanique
rue du Méridien
rue du Moulin
rue la Limite
rue Tiberghie
rue Potagère
quai au Bois à Brûler
quai aux Briques
rue de Flandre
place de Brouckère
place des Martyrs
rue du Marais
Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie
place Ste-Catherine
place de la Monnaie
bd. Anspach
r. des Comédiens
bd. de Berlaimont
bd. Pacheco
rue Royale
bd. Bisschoffsheim
place de la Liberté
chaussée de Louvain
rue de l'Ecuyer
rue des Bouchers
place de la Bourse
bd. de l'Impératrice
rue de la Croix de Fer
rue de Louvain
av. des Arts
rue Marie-Thérèse
Palais de la Nation
rue de la Loi
rue Joseph II
See Inset
rue du Lombard
rue du Chêne
rue des Alexiens
Gare Centrale
place St-Jean
place de l'Albertine
PARC DE BRUXELLES
rue Ducale
bd. du Régent
av. des Arts
rue du Commerce
rue de la Science
rue d'Arlon
rue de la Loi
rue Belliard
rue Montoyer
rue de l'Industrie
rue du Luxembourg
place du Luxembourg
bd. de l'Empereur
place du Grand-Sablon
place Royale
place des Palais
place de la Chapelle
rue de la Miroir
rue de Namur
rue de la Régence
place du Petit-Sablon
rue des Capucins
rue Haute
rue de Mimines
rue Allard
place Poelaert
bd. de Waterloo
Palais de Justice
r. des Chevaliers de Strassart
chaussée du Wavre
rue du Trône
rue aux Laines
av. de la Toison d'Or
av. Louise
rue du Prince Royal
chaussée d'Ixelles
rue Goffart
rue Sans-Souci
bd. de Waterloo
rue Jourdan
rue Bosquet
rue de la Keyenveld
place Fern. Cocq
rue Berckmans
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similar, but to do so would seem to remove all class from the name of what is beyond a doubt one of Europe's most handsome city squares. Today its elegant grace survives its role as the center of Brussels's tourist circuit. Once the pride of the Habsburg Empire, the Grand-Place (*Grote Markt* in Dutch) has always been the very heart of Brussels. Jean Cocteau called it "a splendid stage."

Down the ages, the Grand-Place has seen just about everything a harsh world has to offer, including one episode, in 1695, when it was blown to bits by enemy artillery. Its present composition dates mostly from the late 1690s, thanks to France's Louis XIV. In 1695 his army lined up its big guns on the heights of Anderlecht and blasted away at the medieval Grand-Place, using the Town Hall spire as a target marker. The French gunners destroyed the square, but, ironically, the Town Hall spire escaped undamaged. Other structures were not so fortunate, however, among them the wood-fronted buildings of the great trading and mercantile guilds.

But the Bruxellois weren't about to let a mere French king do away with their centuries-old corporate headquarters. The guildsmen had the place up and running again within 4 years, on the same grand scale as before but on more solid foundations. Each guild competed to outdo the others with highly ornate facades of gold leaf and statuary, often with emblems of their guilds. Thanks to the town's close monitoring of later alterations, the baroque splendor of these buildings has been preserved. The result throws one's sense of time out of joint, as the medieval atmosphere is conjured up mostly in the richly decorated baroque style known as the Flemish Renaissance. The Town Hall, though badly damaged by Louis's guns, is the real thing, however, dating from the early 1400s.

Top honors go to the Gothic **Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** and the neo-Gothic **Maison du Roi (King's House)** (see "A Detailed Tour of the Square" below. Don't miss the cafes lodged within the opulent wooden interiors of old guild houses; their upper-floor windows overlooking the Grand-Place give some of the best views in Europe. Stop by at noon, when the tower of the Maison du Roi plays golden **carillon chimes** reminiscent of an earlier European era

It's only natural the magnificent Grand-Place should be the setting for some of Brussels's most memorable free events. On the first Tuesday and Thursday in July, you can watch the **Ommegang,** a parade of noble families dressed in historical costumes. Mid-August in even-numbered years, the **Carpet of Flowers** covers the cobblestones with over 700,000 begonias arranged in a kind of tapestry. During **Christmastime** a large tree is erected at the center and a crèche is placed at the lower end, and the square hosts the city's Christmas Market.

Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) ★★ Both the inside and the outside of this magnificent construction from 1402 repay careful study. The facade shows off Gothic intricacy at its best, complete with dozens of arched windows and sculptures. Some of these, like the drunken monks, a sleeping Moor and his harem, and St. Michael slaying a female devil, display a sense of humor—or at any rate what passed for humor in the Middle Ages—as well as skill. And the interior is lavish enough even for the extravagant tastes of the imperial aldermen who ruled over the city from here. A 66m (215-ft.) tower sprouts from the middle, yet it's not placed directly in the center. A colorful but untrue legend has it that when the architect realized his "error," he jumped from the summit of the tower.

The building is still the seat of the civic government, and its wedding room is a popular place to tie the knot. You can visit the interior on 40-minute tours, which start in a room full of paintings of the past foreign rulers of Brussels, who

have included the Spanish, Austrians, French, and Dutch. In the spectacular Gothic Hall, open for visits when the city's aldermen are not in session—and surrounded by mirrors, presumably so each party can see what underhanded maneuvers the others are up to—you can see baroque decoration. In other chambers are 16th- to 18th-century tapestries. One of these depicts the Spanish duke of Alba, whose cruel features reflect the brutal oppression he and his Council of Blood imposed on the Low Countries; others show scenes from the life of Clovis, first king of the Franks.

Grand-Place. ✆ **02/279-43-65.** Admission (for guided tours only) 3€ ($3.75) adults, 2€ ($2.50) children 6–15, under 6 free. Apr–Sept Tues–Wed 3:15pm, Sun 10:45am and 12:15pm; Oct–Mar Tues–Wed 3:15pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée de la Ville (City Museum) Housed in the neo-Gothic Maison du Roi (King's House)—which, despite its name, has never housed a king—this museum displays a varied collection focused on the art and history of Brussels.

On the ground floor you can admire detailed tapestries from the 16th and 17th centuries, and porcelain, silver, and stone statuary. After climbing a beautiful wooden staircase, you can trace the history of Brussels in old maps, prints, photos, and models. Among the most fascinating displays are old paintings and modern scale reconstructions of the historic city center, particularly those depicting riverside activity along the now-vanished Senne River. There are also exhibits on traditional arts and crafts, such as tapestry and lace. On the third floor are more than 650 costumes that have been donated to outfit Brussels's famous *Manneken-Pis* statue (see below).

Grand-Place 1. ✆ **02/279-43-50.** Admission 3€ ($3.75) adults; 2.50€ ($3.15) seniors, students, visitors with disabilities, and children 6–15; children under 6 free. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

A DETAILED TOUR OF THE SQUARE

The Grand-Place is one of those places that repays both a generalized visual sweep around the entire ensemble to absorb the spectacle whole and entire, and a careful, close-up perusal of the myriad details, large and small, that make up an entity greater than the sum of its parts. Several streets lead onto the rectangle of the Grand-Place. Coming from the direction of Gare Centrale, you will most likely enter the square at its southeastern angle, on rue de la Colline, off of rue du Marché-aux-Herbes.

Going clockwise around the square from this point, you begin with the long building to your left, nos. 13 through 19, a harmonious array of seven mansions behind a single facade, known collectively as the **Maison des Ducs de Brabant (House of the Dukes of Brabant)** ★. The impressive house dates from 1698 and is adorned with busts of 19 dukes of the ancient duchy of Brabant on the pilasters, and with a curved pediment below which is a sculptured allegory of Abundance. From first to last, the seven mansions are: no. 19, La Bourse (The Stock Exchange)—not to be confused with the city's main Stock Exchange (described later in this chapter); no. 18, La Colline (The Hill), formerly the Stonemasons' Guildhouse; no. 17, Le Pot d'Etain (The Pewter Tankard), formerly the Carpenters' Guildhouse; no. 16, Le Moulin à Vent (The Windmill), formerly the Millers' Guildhouse; no. 15, La Fortune (Fortune), formerly the Tanners' Guildhouse; no. 14, L'Ermitage (The Hermitage), also known as L'Ecrevisse (The Crayfish); and no. 13, La Renommé (Fame). A point of contemporary interest is the traditional Belgian restaurant **'t Kelderke,** in the cellar at no. 15 (see "Where to Dine" in chapter 3). The small but tasty **Musée du Cacao et du Chocolat (Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate),** Grand-Place 13 (✆ **02/514-20-48;** www.mucc.be), introduces you to some of the secrets of Belgium's love affair with handmade pralines. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday (also Mon July–Aug) from 10:30am to 4pm; admission is 5€ ($6.25) for adults, 4€ ($5) for seniors and students, and free for children under 12. Next door, on the corner of rue des Chapeliers, is no. 12A, a private residence called **L'Alsemberg.**

Cross over rue des Chapeliers, a street that leads to an enclave of cheap Greek and Middle Eastern snack bars. On this side of the Grand-Place are two relatively unadorned private homes: **Le Mont Thabor** from 1699 at no. 12 and **La Rose (The Rose)** from 1702, at no. 11, named for the Van der Rosen family who lived in an earlier incarnation of the house during the 15th century.

Continuing around, no. 10, dubbed **L'Arbre d'Or (The Golden Tree),** and also known as the Maison des Brasseurs Belges (House of the Belgian Brewers),

from 1698, continues to be headquarters of the Brewers' Guild, and is the location of the neat little **Musée des Brasseurs Belge (Belgian Brewers' Museum),** where you get an introduction to an age-old brewing tradition that has bequeathed this small nation some 450 different beers (see "More Museums & Attractions" later in this chapter). On the roof is a gilded equestrian sculpture from 1901 of Duke Charles of Lorraine. The next house, no. 9, also from 1698, is called **Le Cygne (The Swan),** as you might guess from the sculptured swan above the doorway. The Butchers' Guildhouse from 1720 onward, it now houses the ultrarefined Belgian/French restaurant **La Maison du Cygne** (see "Where to Dine" in chapter 3), the entrance being around the corner on rue Charles Buls. Standing as if on stilts, no. 8, **L'Etoile (The Star),** is a small house that was demolished in 1852 and rebuilt in 1897 over the archway on rue Charles Buls. You might as well do what every visitor does and ensure some good luck by rubbing the bronze deathbed sculpture of Everard 't Serclaes, on this side street. Serclaes was a 14th-century local hero who freed the city from the clutches of the counts of Flanders, and who later died from wounds received while resisting another would-be conqueror.

The monumental Gothic building across rue Charles Buls is the **Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall),** a glorious statement of Brussels's medieval pride and prestige (see above).

Cross over rue de la Tête d'Or to the northwest face of the square. At no. 7 **Le Renard (The Fox),** formerly the Haberdashers' Guildhouse, dates from 1699. Look out for the reliefs of typical haberdashery tasks on the busy facade, along with sculptures representing Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, and on the roof a statue of St. Nicholas, the guild's patron saint. Among the most interesting houses on the square is no. 6, the Italian-Flemish **Le Cornet (The Horn),** from 1697, which takes its name from a relief of a horn above the doorway. This was the Boatmen's Guildhouse, as you might well guess from the nautical images on the facade and the pediment in the shape of a sailing ship's stern. Images of ancient Rome adorn the facade of no. 5, **La Louve (The She-Wolf),** also in the Italian-Flemish style, from 1696, among them the classic image of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf. Look out also for the medallions of the emperors Trajan, Tiberius, Augustus, and Julius Caesar, on a building that was the Archers' Guildhouse.

No. 4, **Le Sac (The Sack),** formerly the Carpenters' and Coopers' Guildhouse, is notable in that the lower floors survived the 1695 French bombardment, and this part of the house dates from 1644. The post-bombardment rebuilding of the upper floors follows the original style. Likewise, no. 3, **La Brouette (The Wheelbarrow),** survived the French guns more-or-less intact, though the 1645 facade was embellished in later years, and there's a sculpture of St. Gilles, the guild's patron saint, on the gable. The Bakers' Guild clearly wasn't short of either cash or cachet in those days, and they invested plenty of both in their guild house at nos. 1 and 2, **Le Roy d'Espagne (The King of Spain)** ★, from 1697. A neoclassical Italianate look extends to a cupola surmounted by a gilded weather vane. Medallions pick up the Roman notion from La Louve (see above), this time with images of emperors Marcus Aurelius, Nerva, Decius, and Trajan. But the best part of this ornate building is that it houses one of Brussels's finest traditional cafes, and even if its location has ensured that it's become a touristy one, be sure to invest some time in a drink at one of the upstairs tables, looking out on the beautiful cobbled square.

Christmas in the Grand-Place

One of the great Brussels Christmas traditions is the kidnapping of the infant Jesus. This is not a case of Belgians reinterpreting the New Testament story, but the handiwork of Christmas pranksters—thieves, if you prefer—who make off with the doll that plays the part of Jesus lying in the crib in the Nativity scene at the Grand-Place. Fresh supplies of Jesus dolls have to be kept on-hand to keep the Holy Family up to strength, since it is generally agreed that a Nativity scene without the child Jesus is a great disappointment to visitors.

Assuming that all the characters are present, however, the view of the Holy Family in the Grand-Place is a memorable one. The warmly lit windows of the square's 17th-century guild houses, the Town Hall's extravagant Gothic tracery, and the scarcely less fantastic neo-Gothic lines of the King's House make a picturesque backdrop to the manger-in-a-stable scene, and the real sheep and goats wandering around the grounds add a charming touch. So far, no one has stolen any of the animals, but it's probably only a matter of time. The stable is dominated by a giant illuminated Christmas tree, which is donated every year by a foreign country.

When freshly fallen snow covers the cobbles, the whole storybook square glows like an icon. In so many ways, and at different times of year, the Grand-Place is the city's showcase. Christmas is no exception.

Two weekends before Christmas is the occasion for the European Union Christmas Market in the Grand-Place. From Friday evening until Sunday evening, the square is a hub of activity, as each country of the E.U. sets out its stall with traditional foods and other products. There's music, singing, and dancing, and the festive spirit is fueled by mulled wine and typical national drinks. The main problem is that at times the square gets so busy that it is almost impossible to move. Still, this is another colorful and memorable event.

You now cross over rue au Beurre. The row of houses from nos. 39 to 34 forms the plainest segment of buildings on the Grand-Place, allowing you a break from detailed facade-perusing. From left to right, the six are called **L'Ane (The Donkey), Ste-Barbe (St. Barbara), Le Chêne (The Oak Tree), Le Peitit Renard (The Little Fox), Le Paon (The Peacock),** and **Le Heaume (The Helmet).** Across rue Chair et Pain is the neo-Gothic **Maison du Roi (King's House)**, which houses the City Museum (see above).

Moving on across rue des Harengs, you arrive at the final segment of buildings. No. 28 has a strange name (even by the standard set by some of the others). It's called **La Chambrette de l'Amman (The Little Chamber of the Amman),** from 1709. The Amman was the name for a kind of early mayor of the city, a minion of the dukes of Brabant. An alternate name is Le Marchand d'Or (The Gold Merchant), presumably because it was once a gold merchant's premises. Nos. 26 and 27, **Le Pigeon (The Pigeon),** from 1697, was the Painters' Guildhouse. In the 1850s Victor Hugo spent part of his time in exile

from France here, firing off literary broadsides at Napoleon III until the City Fathers asked him to leave town for fear the scandalized French emperor would send an army to bring him back. Now the house is home to a fine lace store, the Maison Antoine (see "Shopping" later in this chapter).

St. Boniface, a native of Brussels, blesses passersby from the roof of nos. 24 and 25, known as **La Chaloupe d'Or (The Golden Sloop),** or the Maison des Tailleurs (House of the Tailors), whose guild house it once was. Nowadays, under its first-mentioned name, it's another of the Grand-Place's standout cafes. A bust of St. Barbara, the patroness of tailors, is above the doorway. No. 23, **L'Ange (The Angel),** from 1697, is a private house in the Italian Flemish style, graced by Doric and Ionic pilasters. Nos. 21 and 22 and 20, respectively known as **Joseph et Anne (Joseph and Anne),** from 1700, and **Le Cerf (The Stag),** from 1710, are relatively plain private dwellings. Le Cerf houses a private society of the same name.

2 Brussels's Other Principal Squares

In addition to the Grand-Place, a number of other historic squares are scattered across the center city, each one of them different, and each one well worth strolling around.

PLACE DU GRAND-SABLON ★★

Though the traffic passing through it diminishes the experience, the square (tram: 92, 93, or 94) is filled with sidewalk cafes and lined with gabled mansions, and locals consider it a classier place to see and be seen than the Grand-Place. The Grand-Sablon is also antiques territory; many of its mansions house antiques stores or private art galleries with pricey merchandise on display. The dealerships have spread into neighboring side streets as well. Saturday and Sunday mornings, an excellent antiques market sets up its stalls in front of the **Eglise Notre-Dame du Sablon** (see "Sights of Religious Significance" later in this chapter). At the lower end of the square, the statue of Minerva dates from 1751 and was a gift from England's earl of Aylesbury.

PLACE DU PETIT-SABLON ★

Just across rue de la Régence is the Grand-Sablon's little cousin (tram: 92, 93, or 94). An ornamental garden with a fountain and pool, it's a magical little retreat from the city bustle. The 48 bronze statuettes adorning the surrounding wrought-iron fence symbolize Brussels's medieval guilds. Two statues in the center commemorate the counts of Egmont and Hornes, who were beheaded in 1568 for protesting the cruelties of the Council of Blood, the enforcement arm of Spain's Holy Inquisition in the Low Countries.

Fun Fact The Lost River

Believe it or not, Brussels is built on a river called the Senne (no, not *that* one; that's the *Seine,* and it's in some other place called Paris). The City Fathers ordered Brussels's river bricked over and tucked away out of sight in the 19th century because it smelled bad and bred disease. Brussels now has no river, but you can still see traces of the missing waters—cleaned up somewhat, I'm happy to say—under the arches of a courtyard off of place St-Géry, in the Lower Town.

PLACE ROYALE ★

Brussels's royal square (tram: 92, 93, or 94) stands at the meeting point of rue de la Régence and rue Royale, two streets that hold many of the city's premier attractions. The square, which was laid out in 18th-century neoclassical style by the French architect Barre, is graced by an appropriately heroic **equestrian statue** of the leader of the First Crusade, Duke Godefroid de Bouillon. The inscription describes him as the "First King of Jerusalem," a title Godefroid himself refused, accepting instead that of Protector of the Holy Places (which amounted to the same thing). Also on place Royale is the neoclassical **Eglise St-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg.** Archaeologists have excavated the foundations of the Royal Palace of Emperor Charles V in the square, but the site has been covered over again.

A fascinating, underground extension of the Bellevue Museum is the **Palais du Coudenberg (Coudenberg Palace),** place des Palais 7 (✆ **02/548-04-48**)—or more accurately the excavated ground floor and foundations of this sometime palace of the dukes of Burgundy and the Habsburg emperors that burned to the ground in 1731. Among rooms you can visit are the 1533 private chapel of Emperor Charles V and the Magna Aula (Throne Room) where he abdicated in 1555. The palace is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm. Admission is included in the ticket for the Bellevue Museum.

PLACE DES MARTYRS

A few years ago this once elegant 18th-century square (Métro: Brouckère), in the lower city near the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, where the "500 Martyrs" of Belgium's 1830 War of Independence are entombed, was in a sorry state, literally crumbling to the ground. It has been extensively restored, and though it lost some of its former ragged charm in the process, the square is once again an important and attractive public place.

3 The Top Museums & Galleries

See also "Musée du Cinquantenaire," under "Parc du Cinquantenaire," below.

Musée Horta (Horta Museum) ★ Art Nouveau might takes its name from the gallery art dealer Siegfried Bing opened in Paris in 1895, but Brussels considers itself the capital of this medley of related art styles that burst across the Western world at the end of the 19th century and drew on exotic sources, including Celtic, Viking, Oriental, and Islamic art. The city owes much of its rich Art Nouveau heritage—literally, because his town houses in the city have been designated as World Heritage sites—to the inspired creative vision of Victor Horta (1861–1947), a resident architect who led the style's development. His home and an adjoining studio have been restored to their original condition and are now a museum. They showcase his use of flowing, sinuous shapes and colors in interior decoration as well as architecture.

rue Américaine 25 (off of chaussée de Charleroi). ✆ **02/543-04-90.** www.hortamuseum.be. Admission 4.95€ ($6.20) adults, 3.70€ ($4.65) seniors/students, 2.50€ ($3.15) children 5–18, children under 5 free. Tues–Sun 2–5:30pm. Closed holidays. Tram: 81, 82, 91, or 92.

Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale/Koninklijke Museum voor Midden Afrika (Royal Museum of Central Africa) ★★ Originally founded to celebrate Belgium's colonial empire in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), this museum has moved beyond imperialism to feature exhibits on ethnography and environment, mostly in Africa, but also in Asia and

A New Art

A new design style appeared towards the end of the 19th century and flourished for a few decades. It was called Art Nouveau in the United States and Britain. Art Nouveau's prime materials were glass and iron, which were worked with decorative curved lines and floral and geometric motifs. Belgium produced one of its greatest exponents in Victor Horta (1861–1947); his work can be seen in Brussels where the Tassel House (1893) and the Hôtel Solvay (1895) are forerunners of the ambitious Maison du Peuple (1896–99), with its concave, curved facades and location within an irregularly shaped square. His most famous building was the Innovation department store (1901), which was destroyed by fire.

Fans of the city's superb legacy of Art Nouveau architecture should check out the works of Gustave Strauven (1878–1919), the Brussels-born student of master Victor Horta. Strauven's signature is his use of blue and yellow bricks. He built the Maison St-Cyr on Square Ambiorix, and around 100 private homes in Brussels and Tournai. A private enthusiast is restoring his home from 1902 at rue Luther 28.

South America. The beautiful grounds of this impressive museum, which is just outside of Brussels in the Flemish commune of Tervuren, are as much a draw as the exhibits inside. The collection includes some excellent animal dioramas, African sculpture, and other artwork, and even some of the colonial-era guns and artillery pieces that no doubt helped make Belgium's claim to its African colonies more convincing. A more modern perspective is added by environmental displays that explain desertification, the loss of rainforests, and the destruction of habitats.

Leuvensesteenweg 13, Tervuren (a suburban commune just east of Brussels). ✆ **02/769-52-11.** www.africamuseum.be. Admission 3€ ($3.75) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) children under 13. Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Tram: 44 from Métro Montgomery station to Tervuren terminus.

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (Royal Museums of Fine Arts) ★★★

The city's premier collections of both historical and modern art are together in a single institution. These two museums—the **Musée d'Art Ancien (Museum of Historical Art)** and the **Musée d'Art Moderne (Museum of Modern Art)**—combine under one roof (connected by a passage) a memorable panoply of art, from some of the finest works of Flemish old masters, such as Brueghel, Rubens, Van Dyck, and Frans Hals to Magritte, Delvaux, and Permeke. The collection shows off works, most of them Belgian, from the 14th to the 20th centuries. It starts in the historical section, with Hans Memling's portraits from the late 15th century, which are marked by sharp lifelike details; works by Hieronymus Bosch; and Lucas Cranach's *Adam and Eve.* You should particularly seek out the subsequent rooms featuring Pieter Brueghel, including his *Adoration of the Magi,* and *Fall of Icarus.* Don't miss his unusual *Fall of the Rebel Angels,* with grotesque faces and beasts. But don't fear—many of Brueghel's paintings, like *Winter Landscape with Ice Skaters* and those depicting Flemish village life, are of a less fiery nature. Later artists represented include Peter Paul Rubens, Antoon Van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, Frans Hals, and Rembrandt.

Next door, in a circular building connected to the main entrance, the modern-art section has an emphasis on underground works—if only because the museum's eight floors are all below ground level. The overwhelming collection includes works by Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Salvador Dalí, Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Joan Miró, and local boys Renée Magritte, Paul Delvaux, James Ensor, Félicien Rops, Pierre Alechinsky, Henri de Braekeleer, Constant Permeke, and more.

rue de la Régence 3 (at place Royale). ✆ **02/508-32-11.** www.fine-arts-museum.be. Admission 5€ ($6.25) adults; 3.50€ ($4.40) students, seniors, visitors with disabilities, and children 13 and over; children under 13 free; free for everyone 1st Wed afternoon of the month (except during special exhibits). Museum of Historical Art Tues–Sun 10am–noon and 1–5pm; Museum of Modern Art Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 2–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Parc.

4 Important Buildings & Monuments

The ornately decorated **Bourse (Stock Exchange),** rue Henri Maus 2 (✆ **02/509-12-11;** Métro: Bourse), a landmark of the French Second Empire architectural style, dates from 1873. It's a temple to the venerable religion of making money, and is not open to casual visitors.

You may not want to spend too much time around the **Palais de Justice (Palace of Justice),** place Poelaert (adjacent to place Louise; ✆ **02/508-65-78;** Métro: Louise). This is, after all, where people who have run afoul of the law go directly to jail. Nonetheless, it's worth viewing architect Joseph Poelaert's extravagant (some would say megalomaniac) 19th-century neoclassical temple dedicated to the might and majesty of the law. The palace's domed magnificence looms over the rebellious, working-class Marolles district, a none-too-subtle warning to the lower orders that its creators undoubtedly considered salutary. You can visit the reception hall of the palace, which is open Monday to Friday from 9 to 11:30am and 1:30 to 3pm. Admission is free.

Not much has survived of the architecture of Burgundian-era Brussels; even the royal palace of the Burgundians and their Habsburg successors bit the dust due to fire. Part of the 15th/16th-century palace survives above ground, 2 blocks east of Gare Centrale, in the redbrick **Hôtel Ravenstein,** rue Ravenstein 1–3 (Métro: Gare Centrale). Like the Hôtel de Ville, this is not a hotel at all. It houses a professional institute and the fancy French restaurant Le Relais des Caprices. But it does give you some idea of what Burgundian-era Brussels looked like—at least in those parts of the city occupied by blue bloods.

The only surviving gateway from Brussels's once imposing 14th-century defensive walls is the squat and imposing **Porte de Hal,** at the junction of avenue de la Porte de Hal and chaussée de Waterloo (Métro: Porte de Hal).

TWO PALACES

Palais de la Nation (National Palace) The Parliament building opposite the Parc de Bruxelles is quite an elegant place, if you ignore the politicians squabbling in the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate—bickering, after all, is part of the charm of democracy. You can enter only during sessions in either assembly (call in advance; they're usually Mon–Sat 10am–3pm). The entrance to the Chamber is at rue de Louvain 11; the entrance to the Senate is at rue de Louvain 7B. You can also call ahead to arrange a guided tour of the actual building.

rue de la Loi 16. ✆ **02/519-81-36.** Free admission. Métro: Parc.

Impressions

The principal [fountain] whereof is the Mannicke Piss, being the figure of a brass boy erected upon a pedestal, the water issuing from his privy member (at a good distance) into a stone cistern.

—William Lord Fitzwilliam, April 16, 1663

Palais Royal (Royal Palace) The King's Palace, which overlooks the Parc de Bruxelles, was begun in 1820 and had a grandiose Louis XVI–style face-lift in 1904. The older side wings date from the 18th century and are flanked by two pavilions, one of which sheltered numerous notables during the 1800s. Today the palace is used for state receptions. It also contains the offices of King Albert II, though he and Queen Paola do not live there. When the national flag flies, it means the sovereign is in Belgium.

place des Palais. ✆ **02/551-20-20.** Free admission. July 22 to late Sept Tues–Sun 10:30am–4:30pm. Métro: Parc.

MANNEKEN-PIS

A fountain in the shape a urinating child, the famous small bronze **sculpture** on the corner of rue du Chêne and rue de l'Etuve (Métro: Gare Centrale), 2 blocks south of the Grand-Place, is Brussels's favorite character, gleefully doing what a little boy's gotta do. More often than not he's watched by a throng of admirers snapping pictures. Children especially seem to enjoy his bravura performance. This is not the original statue, which was prone to theft and anatomical maltreatment and was removed for safekeeping.

No one knows when this child first came into being, but it's clear he dates from quite a few centuries ago—the 8th century, according to one legend. It's known that the boy's effigy has graced the city since at least the time of Duke of Burgundy Philip the Good, who became count of Flanders in 1419. Among the speculations about his origins are that he was the son of a Brussels nobleman who got lost and was found while answering nature's call, and also that he was a patriotic Belgian kid who sprinkled a hated Spanish sentry passing beneath his window. Perhaps the best theory is that he saved the Town Hall from a sputtering bomb by extinguishing it—like Gulliver—with the first thing handy.

Thieves have made off with the tyke several times in history. One criminal who stole and shattered the statue in 1817 was sentenced to a life of hard labor. The pieces were used to recast another version and that "original" has been removed for safekeeping. King Louis XV of France began the tradition of presenting colorful costumes to "Little Julian" to make amends for the French abduction of the statue in 1747. Since then the statue has acquired more than 500 outfits, which are housed in the Musée de la Ville in the Grand-Place. These include a Santa costume complete with a white beard, an Elvis suit, and the uniform of Britain's Welsh Guards, and each one is equipped with a strategically positioned orifice so that the little statue's normal function is not impaired

Incidentally, *Manneken-Pis* has a female counterpart, ***Jeanneke-Pis.*** This was the 1987 "brainwave" of a local restaurateur who wanted to attract business; its lack of grace is an embarrassment to many Bruxellois. You'll find her on impasse de la Fidélité, off of rue des Bouchers.

5 Parc du Cinquantenaire

Designed to celebrate the half centenary of Belgium's 1830 independence, the Cinquantenaire (Golden Jubilee) Park was a work in progress from the 1870s until well into the 20th century. Extensive gardens have at their heart a triumphal arch topped by a bronze four-horse chariot sculpture, representing *Brabant Raising the National Flag,* flanked by several fine museums.

Autoworld *Kids* Even if you're not a car enthusiast, you'll likely find this display of 500 historic cars set in the hangarlike Palais Mondial fascinating. The collection starts with 1899 early motorized tricycles and moves on to a 1911 Model T Ford, a 1924 Renault, a 1938 Cadillac that was the official White House car for FDR and Truman, a 1956 Cadillac used by Eisenhower and then by Kennedy during his June 1963 visit to Berlin, and more.

Parc du Cinquantenaire 11. ✆ **02/736-41-65.** www.autoworld.be. Admission 5€ ($6.25) adults; 3.70€ ($4.65) students, seniors, and visitors with disabilities; 2€ ($2.50) children 6–13; children under 6 free. Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 9:30am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Métro: Mérode.

Musée du Cinquantenaire ★ This vast museum shows off an eclectic collection of antiques, decorative arts (tapestries, lace, porcelain, silver, furniture, toys, stained glass, jewels, folklore, and old vehicles, including 18th-century coupes, sedan chairs, sleighs, and royal coaches, and sculptures), and archaeology. Some highlights are an Assyrian relief from the 9th century B.C., a Greek vase from the 6th century B.C., a tabletop model of imperial Rome in the 4th century A.D., the A.D. 1145 reliquary of Pope Alexander, some exceptional tapestries, and colossal statues from Easter Island.

Parc du Cinquantenaire 10. ✆ **02/741-72-11.** www.kmkg-mrah.be. Admission 4€ ($5) adults, 2.50€ ($3.15) students and seniors, 1.25€ ($1.55) children 12–18, children under 12 free. Free admission every 1st Wed afternoon of the month (except during special exhibits). Tues–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Mérode.

Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire (Royal Museum of the Army and Military History) *Kids* Since Belgium is not and never has been a great military power, this is one of Brussels's often forgotten museums, even though the huge collection is one of the finest in Europe. It includes an extensive display of armor, uniforms, and weapons from various Belgian campaigns (like the Congo), a massive amount of World War I artillery, an aircraft hangar of 130 impressive planes, and a World War II collection of Nazi flags that brings the Nürnberg rallies to mind. Anyone interested in military history shouldn't miss this superb though cluttered collection.

Parc du Cinquantenaire (opposite Autoworld). ✆ **02/733-44-93.** www.klm-mra.be. Free admission. Tues–Sun 9am–noon and 1–4:45pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1, Dec 25. Métro: Merode.

6 Sights of Religious Significance

Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule (Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula) ★★ Although more than a little plain to look at, both outside and inside, compared to the generally extravagantly decorated run of Gothic cathedrals, St-Michel's, dedicated to the city's patron St. Michael, and to St. Gudula, has much to commend it. Its purity of line and lack of superfluous frills seems like the distilled essence of a style that dominated European cityscapes for half a millennia. Victor Hugo considered this magnificent church to be the "purest flowering of the Gothic style." Begun in 1226—its choir is Belgium's earliest

Gothic work—it was officially consecrated as a cathedral only in 1961. The 16th-century Habsburg Emperor Charles V donated the superb stained-glass windows. Apart from these, the spare interior decoration focuses attention on its soaring columns and arches. The bright exterior stonework makes a fine sight. On Sunday at 10am the Eucharist is celebrated with a Gregorian choir. In July, August, and September, polyphonic masses are sung by local and international choirs at 10am. August to October, chamber-music and organ concerts are occasionally performed on weekdays at 8pm. In spring and autumn at 12:30pm, Mass is sung accompanied by instrumental soloists and readings by actors (in French).

Parvis Ste-Gudule (off of bd. de l'Impératrice 2 blocks west of Gare Centrale). ✆ **02/217-83-45.** www.kathedraalstmichiel.be. Cathedral, free admission; crypt, treasury, archaeological zone 2.50€ ($3.15). Mon–Fri 8am–6pm; Sat–Sun 8:30am–6pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Eglise Notre-Dame du Sablon (Church of Our Lady of the Sablon) ★ This flamboyant late-Gothic church, dating from the 15th to the 16th centuries, was paid for by the city's Guild of Crossbowmen, and was their guild church. It is noted for its four-fold gallery with brightly colored stained-glass windows, illuminated from the inside at night, in striking contrast with the gray-white arches and walls. Also worth seeing are the two baroque chapels decorated with funeral symbols in white marble. Inside is a celebrated statue of St. Hubert with an interesting history: It was actually stolen from Brussels and taken to Antwerp but was seized and returned to the church in 1348, where it has remained ever since.

rue Bodenbroek 6 (at place du Grand-Sablon). ✆ **02/511-57-41.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6:30pm. Tram: 92, 93, or 94 to Petit-Sablon.

Eglise St-Nicolas (Church of St. Nicholas) This delightful little church behind the Bourse is almost hidden by the fine old houses surrounding it, just as its 11th-century Romanesque lines are hidden by a 14th-century Gothic facade and the repairs made after the French bombardment of 1695. The church holds a small painting by Rubens, the *Virgin and Child,* and the *Vladimir Icon,* painted by an artist from Constantinople in 1131.

rue au Beurre. ✆ **02/513-80-22.** Free admission. Métro: Bourse.

Impressions

I saw what a fine street was the Rue Royale, and, walking leisurely along its broad pavement, I continued to survey its stately hotels, till the palisades, the gates, the trees of the park appearing in sight, offered to my eye a new attraction.

—*The Professor,* Charlotte Brontë (1847)

At last we did arrive in Brussels and took our lodgings at the sign of the Old Wolf. Brussels lies in Brabant and in the fullest and most pleasant part of it. It is situated partly on a hill, partly on even ground. The Court lies upon a hill; the fabric of it is but mean and ordinary, yet very commodious and has been formerly the residence of the greatest princes of Europe.

—William Lord Fitzwilliam, April 16, 1663, quoted in *Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travellers, 1660–1720,* Kees van Strien, Amsterdam University Press

Notre-Dame de la Chapelle (Our Lady of the Chapel) This Romanesque-Gothic church is interesting both historically and architecturally. François Anneessens (1660–1719), a Brussels hero who lost his head for campaigning for civil rights, is buried here. Anneessens was a champion of the freedom of the Belgian communes against the centralist rule of Belgium's Austrian masters. Condemned to death, he refused to plead for forgiveness, saying, "Never! I die innocent. May my death expiate my sins and be of service to my country." He was then beheaded in the Grand-Place. A statue of Anneessens stands in the square named after him—place Anneessens—in the city center, and you'll find a commemorative plaque dedicated to him in Notre-Dame's Chapel of the Holy Sacrament. Notre-Dame de la Chapelle is also the burial site of Pieter Brueghel the Elder and his wife; their epitaph is also in one of the chapels.

place de la Chapelle. ✆ **02/512-21-40.** Free admission. Tram: 92, 93, or 94.

7 More Museums & Attractions

Albert I Royal Library This library museum is a tribute to the history of the written word through the centuries. The Book Museum section contains centuries-old manuscripts and ancient books, as well as current books in all disciplines. The Printing Museum has typographical, binding, and lithographical exhibits. The building also holds the National Library of Belgium.

bd. de l'Empereur 4 (public entrance on Mont des Arts). ✆ **02/519-53-11.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–noon and 2–5pm. Closed last week Aug and holidays. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Jardin Botanique This graceful 19th-century glass-and-wrought-iron palace is no longer the Botanical Gardens of Brussels, but it still merits a visit as a monument of 19th-century architecture. There's still a fine ornamental garden outside. Nowadays, the Botanique functions as a cultural center in which theater, music, dance performances, and visiting art exhibitions are presented.

rue Royale 236. ✆ **02/226-12-11.** Free admission to gardens, main building; admission charged for most cultural events. Métro: Botanique.

Musée des Brasseurs Belges (Belgian Brewers' Museum) This museum, operated by the Confederation of Belgian Breweries, is housed in the home of the Brewers' Guild, the Knights of the Mash Staff. A permanent exhibition on modern hi-tech brewing methods has joined an old one on traditional techniques. You'll find numerous paintings, stained-glass windows, and collections of pitchers, pint pots, and old china beer pumps. And you get a chance to sample some of your host's finished product.

Maison des Brasseurs, Grand-Place 10. ✆ **02/511-49-87.** www.beerparadise.be. Admission 3€ ($3.75) adults. Apr–Nov daily 10am–5pm; Dec–Mar Sat–Sun noon–5pm. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée du Costume et de la Dentelle (Costume and Lace Museum) This marvelous museum is near the Grand-Place. Its collection includes some fine examples of historical Belgian lace styles from the once-renowned factories of Mechelen, Bruges, Antwerp, Binche, Turnhout, Poperinge, and Sint-Truiden. In addition, the museum houses displays of costumes, including an array of dresses from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

rue de la Violette 6 (near Grand-Place). ✆ **02/213-44-50.** Admission 2.50€ ($3.15), 2€ ($2.50) children 6–16, children under 6 free. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri 10am–12:30pm and 1:30–5pm (until 4pm Oct–Mar); Sat–Sun 2–4:30pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Nov 1 and 11, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Moments A Stroll Through the Marolles

The iconoclastic working-class Marolles district, lying beneath the long shadow of the Palace of Justice, is a special place where the old Brussels dialect called *Brusseleir* can still be heard. It's a generally poor community, under constant threat of encroachment and gentrification from neighboring, far wealthier areas—a process the Marolliens seem to want nothing to do with. Locals remain resolutely unimpressed by the burgeoning "Capital of Europe."

Most people get their Marolles initiation by visiting the daily flea market in place du Jeu-de-Balle, which opens at 7am and closes at 2pm. Here the weird-and-wonderful is commonplace. It makes a refreshing change to explore this other Brussels, a simple neighborhood of homes, welcoming cafes, and great, inexpensive restaurants. Simply wander around for an hour or two.

Musée René Magritte From 1930 to 1954 the great Belgian Surrealist artist René Magritte lived and worked in an undistinguished town house in suburban Jette in northwest Brussels. Now restored, that 19-room house is a museum of the artist's life. You can visit most of the rooms but can only view through glass the dining-room-cum-studio where he painted many of his fantastical masterpieces while wearing a three-piece suit. You can even look through the famous window, with a view of nothing in particular, on to which Magritte projected images that would revolutionize art and the way we look at the world. Be warned though that there is very little to see—*This is not a studio,* you might say—even though the museum's founders have been diligent in uncovering bits and pieces of the artist's banal private life. On the first and second floors are a few original sketches; his easel and trademark bowler hat; a pipe; his passport, checkbook, and will; household objects, letters, and photographs illustrating his commercial work; negotiations with museums about exhibitions; and contacts with art dealers.

rue Esseghem 135 (off bd. de Smet de Naeyer). ✆ **02/428-26-26.** www.magrittemuseum.be. Admission 6€ ($7.50) adults, 5€ ($6.25) children 13–18 and students, children under 13 free. Wed–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Tram: 18 to Woeste.

8 Bruparck

Built on the site of the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, this attractions park (Métro: Heysel) is home to the **Atomium** and **Mini-Europe** (see below); **The Village,** a collection of restaurants and cafes, including a restaurant in a 1930s railway car of the legendary Orient Express; **Océade,** an indoor/outdoor watersports pavilion with water slides, pools, and saunas; a **planetarium;** and **Kinepolis,** a 26-screen movie multiplex. Reduced-rate combination tickets are available if you plan to visit the Atomium and Mini-Europe: 15€ ($19) for adults, 10€ ($13) for seniors, students, and children under 13; children under 1.2m (4 ft.) free.

Atomium ★★ *Kids* As the Eiffel Tower is the symbol of Paris, the Atomium is the symbol of Brussels. There's nothing quite like this cluster of giant metal-clad spheres, built for the 1958 World's Fair, which represents the atomic structure of an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times. Closed for renovation through 2005, it's due to reopen early in 2006. It rises 102m (335 ft.) like a

giant plaything of the gods that's fallen to earth. Whatever you think of its founding impulse, it's a fair bet that when you stand underneath this vast schematic representation of an iron atom, you'll be suitably impressed. There may be something very last-century about this paean of praise to the wonders of science and technology, but the Atomium has somehow moved beyond this, taking on a monumental life of its own. The view from the viewing deck on the topmost sphere is marvelous, and you can even wander around inside the spheres.

bd. du Centenaire, Heysel. ✆ **02/475-47-77.** www.atomium.be. Admission 5.50€ ($6.90) adults, 4€ ($5) children under 13, children under 1.2m (4 ft.) free. Last week Mar through June and Sept daily 9:30am–5pm; July–Aug daily 9:30am–7pm (to 11pm mid-July to mid-Aug); Oct–Dec and New Year's holidays 10am–5pm. Métro: Heysel.

Mini-Europe ★ *Kids* Adults and kids alike will get a kick out of strolling around such highlights from member states of the European Union as London's Big Ben, Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Bull Ring in Seville (complete with simulated sounds of fans yelling *Olé!*), and Montmartre in Paris, as well as more modern emblems of Continental achievement such as the Channel Tunnel and the Ariane rocket. Meanwhile, Mount Vesuvius erupts, gondolas float around the canals of Venice, and a Finnish girl dives into the icy waters of a northern lake. As the scale is 1:25, the kids will feel like giants.

Bruparck, Heysel. ✆ **02/478-05-50.** www.minieurope.com. Admission 12€ ($15) adults, 8.70€ ($11) children under 13, children under 1.2m (4 ft.) free. Late Mar through June and Sept daily 9:30am–5pm; July–Aug daily 9:30am–7pm (mid-July to mid-Aug Fri–Sun 9:30am–11pm); Oct–Dec and 1st week Jan 10am–5pm. Closed rest of Jan through late Mar. Métro: Heysel.

9 Parks & Gardens

Brussels is a green city with a great extent of parks and gardens. Once a hunting preserve of the dukes of Brabant, the **Parc de Bruxelles (Brussels Park)** ★★, rue Royale (Métro: Parc), between Parliament and the Royal Palace, was laid out in the 18th century as a landscaped garden. In 1830 Belgian patriots fought Dutch regular troops here during the War of Independence. Later it was a fashionable place to stroll and to meet friends. Although not very big, the park manages to contain everything from carefully trimmed borders to rough patches of trees and bushes, and has fine views along its main paths, which together with the fountain form the outline of Masonic symbols. In 2001 the park was closed for refurbishment and restored as close as possible to its 18th-century look. Diseased chestnut trees have been cut down and lime trees replaced with sturdier specimens; statues have been restored and cleaned; and the 1840s bandstand by Jean-Pierre Cluysenaer has been refurbished, and it now hosts regular summer concerts. The clean-up has diminished the various unwholesome nighttime activities in the park.

The garden of the **Mont des Arts** (Métro: Gare Centrale), in the heart of Brussels, has been given a face-lift (its second: In 1955 an ornamental garden from 1910 was replaced with one in a more modern style). This ornamental assemblage of trees, plants, and fountains, just a few blocks from Gare Centrale, now has a children's play area and new paths, benches, and access points.

The big public park called the **Bois de la Cambre** ★ (tram: 23, 90, 93, or 94) begins at the top of avenue Louise in the southern section of Brussels. Its centerpiece is a small lake with an island in its center that can be reached by a neat little electrically operated pontoon. The park gets crowded on sunny weekends. A few busy roads with fast-moving traffic run through it, so be careful with

Moments Ferry Tale

This'll be a just-a-moment moment—taking a ferryboat trip in the Bois de la Cambre. The ferry in question is a tiny, electrically operated pontoon that makes a 1-minute crossing to Robinson's Island in the lake at the heart of the park.

children. Before the entrance to the park on avenue Louise is a kind of pre-park, in the tranquil grounds of the Abbaye de la Cambre (Abbey of la Cambre). Founded in 1201, the Cistercian abbey was heavily damaged during the religious wars of the 16th century, and was rebuilt in the 19th. The buildings now house a geographical institute.

Adjoining the Bois de la Cambre to the south, the **Forêt de Soignes** is no longer a park with playing areas and regularly mown grass, but a forest that stretches almost to Waterloo. This is a great place to escape the maddening crowds and fuming traffic of Brussels, particularly in the fall, when the colors are dazzling.

10 Especially for Kids

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (Belgian Center for Comic-Strip Art) ★★ *Kids* As you'll soon find out, Belgians are crazy for cartoons. Grown-ups will love this place as much as kids do. Called the CéBéBéDé for short, the center, on a side street not far from the Gothic spires and baroque guild houses of the Grand-Place, is dedicated to comic strips and takes a lofty view of what it calls "the Ninth Art" (see "Comic Cuts" below). As icing on the cake, it's in a restored Art Nouveau department store from 1903, the Magasins Waucquez designed by Victor Horta, which was slated for demolition before the center took it over. The building is an attraction in itself. A model of the red-and-white checkered rocket in which Hergé's Tintin and Snowy flew to the moon long before Armstrong and Aldrin did it in mere fact, takes pride of place at the top of the elegant staircase. Beyond is a comic-strip wonderland. All the big names appear in a library of 30,000 books and in permanent and special exhibitions, including Tintin, Asterix, Thorgal, Lucky Luke, the Smurfs, Charlie Brown, Andy Capp, Suske and Wiske—yes, even Superman, Batman, and the Green Lantern—along with many lesser heroes.

rue des Sables 20 (off of bd. de Berlaimont). ✆ **02/219-19-80.** www.brusselsbdtour.com. Admission 6.20€ ($7.75) adults, 5€ ($6.25) students and seniors, 2.50€ ($3.15) children under 12. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, Dec 25. Métro: Gare Centrale.

Musée des Enfants (Children's Museum) *Kids* Taking its cue from an ancient Chinese proverb, "I see and I forget; I hear and I remember; I do and I understand," this museum brings children face to face with aspects of our everyday world. With the help of visual displays, elaborate sets, and role-playing games, children can drive a tram, ride in a raft, sit in a space capsule, fight a fire, grow crops, produce a television program, plant a Japanese garden, knead dough, and play the part of a fairy-tale hero. The exhibits change every so often and revolve around such themes as the Human Body, Water, the City, Communications, Our Fears and Other Emotions, and many others.

Comic Cuts

Belgium produces 30 million comic-strip books annually, and exports 75% of them. On the Continent, comic strips have a higher status than in the U.S. General De Gaulle once described Tintin as his greatest rival. Novelist Françoise Sagan was photographed in a bed littered with comic-strip books, and academics publish serious studies of the art form in highbrow periodicals.

The Tintin books have sold more than 200 million copies since the youthful adventurer first appeared in 1929, created by the Belgian Georges Rémi, better known as Hergé (the initials of his name reversed and written as they would be pronounced in French). Like all good comic-strip characters, Tintin and his companions, the dog Snowy, short-fused Captain Haddock, and absent-minded Professor Calculus, are ageless. In 2001 Tintin's publishers pulled *Tintin in Tibet* from bookshelves in China after the Chinese insisted on retitling it *Tintin in Chinese Tibet.*

Lucky Luke, the cowpoke who beats his shadow to the draw and whose horse Jolly Jumper plays a mean hand at poker, stars in more than 80 adventures—each of which ends with the hero riding into the sunset singing "I'm a poor lonesome cowboy," and has been adapted for television and computer games. His creator, illustrator Morris (real name Maurice de Bevere), a native of Kortrijk in West Flanders, died at age 77 in 2001.

Themes of displacement and anomie run through the stories in *Thorgal,* a Belgian series with an international following, though the attractions of a good fight are not passed up. Thorgal Aegirsson, born in space and sent to Earth by his mother after his father and grandfather quarreled over whether to invade the planet, lives during the Viking era and knows how to use broadsword and battleaxe to defend himself, his beautiful wife Aarcia, and their two children. He has the Norse gods on his case and must contend against them along with a gallery of cruel human enemies.

But there's a darker side to comic strips: It's called *Bande Dessinée Erotique.* A close look at the titles in Brussels bookstores shows among many harmlessly titillating offerings others that feature graphic images of rape, bestiality, torture, and what verges disturbingly close to pedophilia. And not all of these are roped off in the adult section, but can often easily be perused by kids who came in for *Star Wars* or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.*

rue du Bourgmestre 15 (near the Lakes of Ixelles). ✆ **02/640-01-07.** www.museedesenfants.be. Admission 6.70€ ($8.40). May–June Wed and Sat 2:30–5pm; July Mon–Fri 2:30–5pm; mid-Sept through Apr Wed and Sat–Sun 2:30–5pm. Closed holidays, Sept 27, Dec 24 and 31. Tram: 23 or 90 to bd. Général Jacques.

Musée des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique (Museum of the Natural Sciences of Belgium) *Kids* This handsome interactive museum was totally renovated and modernized for its 150th anniversary in 1996. The natural world

is on display here, from prehistoric to modern times. There are dinosaur skeletons, a marine tank, and ecology displays and dioramas. The star attractions are the animated dinosaurs, models that move when you press a button.

rue Vautier 29 (at chaussée de Wavre). ✆ **02/627-42-11.** www.sciencesnaturelles.be. Admission 4€ ($5) adults; 3€ ($3.75) seniors, students, and children 6–17; children under 6 free. Tues–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat–Sun and school holidays 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1, May 1, Dec 25. Métro: Trône or Maelbeek.

Walibi Belgium ★ *Kids* The park's U.S. owners have brought to a no-doubt grateful public Bugs Bunny, Tweetie Pie, and other stars of the cartoon firmament from across the pond. There are white-knuckle rides like the mountainous Wooden Coaster, more than a kilometer (a little over half a mile) long, the six backward loops of the 75kmph (47 mph) Boomerang, and a Looney Tunes play area for children.

rue J. Dechamps 9, Wavre. ✆ **010/42-15-00.** www.sixflagseurope.com. 29€ ($36) adults, 24€ ($29) children 3–11, children under 3 free. Easter vacation 10am–6pm; May Wed–Sun 10am–6pm; June–July daily 10am–6pm; Aug 10am–8pm; Sept–Oct Sun 10am–6pm. To get there from Brussels by car, take A4/E411 to exit 6 Wavre and follow the signs; by train get out at Bierges station.

11 The European District

Home to the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Ministers, and related institutions, Brussels has no less than 1.2 million sq. m (12.7 million sq. ft.) of office space packed with 20,000-plus Eurocrats to back up its "capital of Europe" tag. Entire neighborhoods full of character were swept away to make room for them.

To tour the heartland of European Union governance, take the Métro to Schuman station. Your first sight is the X-shaped **Palais de Berlaymont (Berlaymont Palace),** the Commission's headquarters, at place Schuman. Once laced with hazardous asbestos and evacuated as a safety hazard, it has been cleaned up and reopened for business. The European Union national flags billow proudly out front.

Across rue de la Loi, the Council of Ministers headquarters, the **Consilium** is instantly recognizable for its facade's lavish complement of rose-colored granite blocks. On its far side, a soothing stroll through little Parc Léopold brings you to the new, postmodern **European Parliament** and **International Conference Center** complex, an architectural odyssey in white marble and tinted glass. Take the passageway through the building's middle to place Léopold, an old square that looks lost and forlorn in comparison to its powerful new neighbors.

12 Organized Tours

BY BUS Coach tours, which last 3 hours and operate throughout the year, are available from **De Boeck Visit Brussels Line,** rue de la Colline 8 (✆ **02/513-77-44**). The cost is 20€ ($23) for adults, 18€ ($21) for students and seniors, and 10€ ($12) for children. Reservations can be made through most hotels, and hotel pickup is often available. Private tours can also be arranged. For high-visibility tours on a fixed circuit through the center, **Open Tours** (✆ **02/466-16-25**) has open-top double-decker buses.

ON FOOT & BY BUS From June 15 to September 15, **Le Bus Bavard,** rue des Thuyas 12 (✆ **02/673-18-35**), operates a 3-hour daily "chatterbus" tour at 10am from the Galeries Royales St-Hubert (Métro: Gare Centrale), a mall next

Value Special & Free Events

I sometimes feel that simply strolling the streets of Brussels is one of the world's best free attractions. For something a bit more spectacular (but still free), don't miss the festive **Ommegang** celebration in the Grand-Place on the first Tuesday and Thursday in July and the street entertainment around this area during the entire month. On the second Sunday in August, there's the **Planting of the Meiboom (May Tree),** another joyous public occasion. And in mid-August of 2006, the Grand-Place will be covered by a spectacular **Carpet of Flowers** for all to see at no charge.

You can enjoy Brussels's greatest masterpiece, the **Grand-Place,** for free, and can see a great variety of events there—including the daily Music and Light shows on summer evenings—without ever reaching for your wallet. The city's many **markets** are a source of free amusement (unless you want to buy something, of course), as are the **summer music festivals,** the **concerts in the parks, some museums,** and the mischievous ***Manneken-Pis.*** Historic churches such as the **Cathédrale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule** and **Notre-Dame du Sablon** cost nothing to enter, though you pay a modest amount to visit the cathedral crypt.

You don't need to pay the entrance fee to enjoy that towering symbol of Brussels, the **Atomium**—indeed, many visitors are disappointed with the interior. It's more impressive on the outside.

Cafes are a true bargain, for most of them allow you to spend hours lingering over just one moderately priced beer and enjoying the marvelous decor and the company of the Bruxellois.

Many **Métro stations** contain artworks by leading modern Belgian artists that you can view for free just by entering the Métro station. Speaking of art, the city prides itself on being a stronghold of **Art Nouveau architecture,** rich in masterpieces of this turn-of-the-19th-century style; with information from the tourist office and a public transportation pass, you can spend a day seeking them out.

to rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 90, a few steps off of the Grand-Place. A walking tour covers the historic center, followed by a bus ride through areas the average visitor never sees. You hear about life in Brussels and get a real feel for the city. The price is 8.75€ ($11). You don't need a reservation for this fascinating experience—just be there by 10am.

ARAU, bd. Adolphe-Max 55 (✆ **02/219-33-45;** www.arau.org; Métro: De Brouckère), organizes tours that help you discover not only Brussels's countless treasures but also problems the city faces. It runs 3-hour themed coach tours: "Grand-Place and Its Surroundings," "Brussels 1900—Art Nouveau," "Brussels 1930—Art Deco," "Surprising Parks and Squares," and "Alternative Brussels." You are advised to book ahead. Tours by bus are 15€ ($19), 12€ ($15) for those under 26; tours by foot are 10€ ($13). They take place on Saturday mornings from March to November; private group tours can be arranged year-round.

WALKING TOUR ILOT SACRE TO THE MAROLLES

Start:	Town Hall, Grand-Place.
Finish:	Town center.
Time:	About 3 hours.
Best Times:	Saturday or Sunday morning, when you can shop in the books-and-antiques market in place du Grand-Sablon.
Worst Times:	Since there are no important museums on this route, there are no open-hours restrictions, so the only "bad" time to do the tour is after the markets have closed—unless street markets hold no charms for you.

This walk winds its way through and around the splendid Grand-Place and will help to orient you in the heart of the old city.

The tour begins at the Town Hall, which houses the tourist office; after you've picked up some brochures and asked the staff any questions you may have, proceed down Petite rue des Bouchers. This district, called the Ilôt Sacré is a jumble of streets and passages where restaurants with outdoor terraces, street musicians, and souvenir vendors provide a noisy and colorful atmosphere. On impasse Schuddeveld, a tiny cul-de-sac off Petite rue des Bouchers, is the:

❶ Théâtre Toone VII

A performance at the famous folk puppet theater, Toone should not be missed. This is a good opportunity to see what shows aren't yet sold out.

Walk farther along the Petite rue de Bouchers to the:

❷ Grand-Place

Some consider this the most beautiful square in the world. This splendid esplanade is surrounded by Flemish Renaissance–baroque guild houses from the 17th century, the neo-Gothic King's House, and the 15th-century Gothic Town Hall. The 91m (300-ft.) tower of the Town Hall bears a spire, on which perches the Archangel Michael, patron saint of the city.

Leave Grand-Place by rue Charles-Buls to the left of the Town Hall. Under the arches of the Maison de l'Etoile is the statue of Everard 't Serclaes, a hero of 14th-century Brussels. Touching the arm of the statue is said to bring you luck. Not far away (about 91m/300 ft. behind Town Hall) on rue de l'Etuve and rue du Chêne, standing atop a fountain, is the charming little statue of:

❸ Manneken-Pis

The "oldest citizen of Brussels" dates from 1619. If you're here on a holiday, the little boy will be dressed in one of his 570 colorful costumes kept at the City of Brussels Museum (Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles).

To your left, go up rue du Chêne; along rue de Dinant and rue de Rollebeek, you come to:

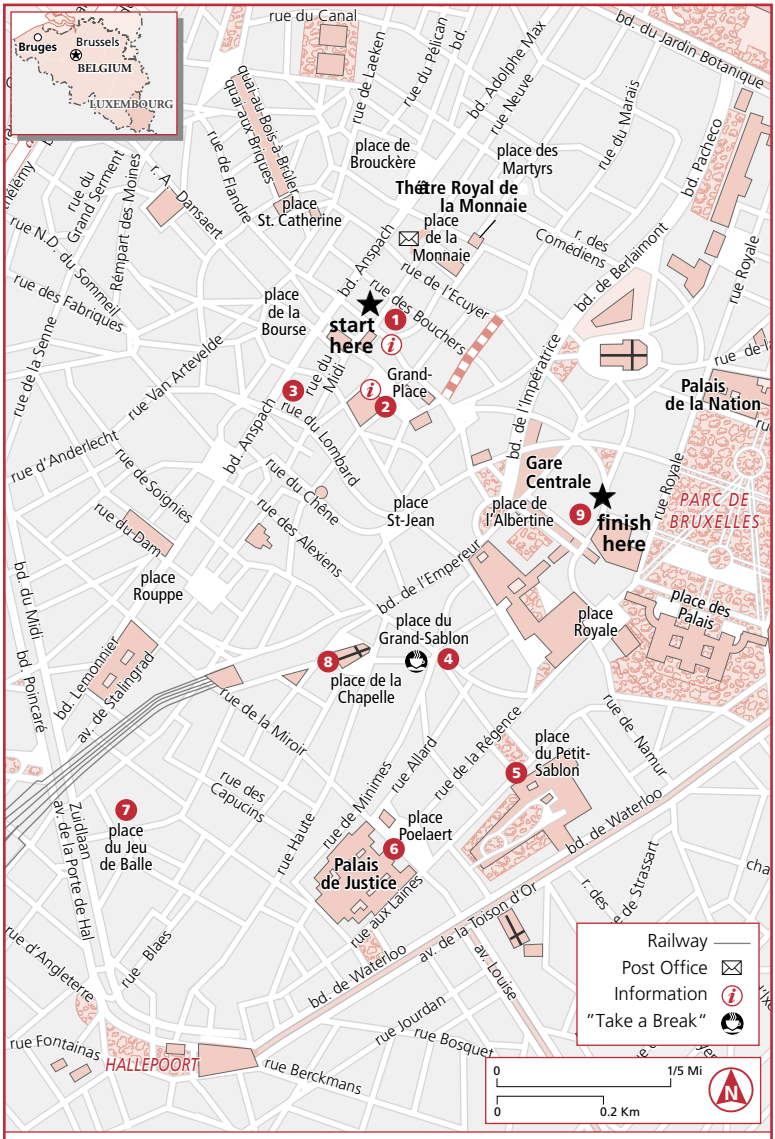
❹ place du Grand-Sablon

This square, filled with antiques stores, is the place to shop for old curios. An excellent books-and-antiques market is held here on Saturday and Sunday mornings. At no. 40 you can visit the Post Office Museum. Take time to admire Notre-Dame-du-Sablon Church, built in the 15th century by the city's crossbowmen. The church is a superb example of the flamboyant Gothic style, which flourished in Belgium in the 14th and 15th centuries.

On the square, it may be time to:

TAKE A BREAK
Despite its French name, **Aux Bons Enfants,** place du Grand-Sablon 49 (✆ **02/512-40-95**), serves all the great Italian specialties—and at surprisingly reasonable prices for the fashionable place du Grand-Sablon. The attractive oak-beamed building dates to 1567.

Walking Tour: Ilôt Sacré to the Marolles



1 Théâtre Toone VII
2 Grand-Place
3 Manneken-Pis
4 Place du Grand-Sablon
5 Place du Petit-Sablon
6 Palais de Justice
7 Place du Jeu-de-Balle
8 Notre-Dame de la Chapelle Church
9 Mont des Arts

Off the larger square, just across rue de la Régence, you come to:

❺ place du Petit-Sablon

Designed by the architect Beyaert and laid out in 1890, this garden square is surrounded by a wrought-iron balustrade bearing 48 little bronze statues that represent the guilds of medieval Brussels. Look in the center of the square for the statues of the counts of Egmont and Hornes, who were beheaded in the Grand-Place for their resistance against Spanish tyranny in the 16th century. Behind the garden stands the Palais d'Egmont. On the corner of rue de la Régence is the Musical Instrument Museum.

Go along rue de la Régence toward the majestic:

❻ Palais de Justice (Law Courts)

This massive building was completed in 1883 after 20 years of construction. From this point, there's a good view of the Marolles quarter.

From behind the Palais de Justice, walk down rue du Faucon and rue des Renards to:

❼ place du Jeu-de-Balle

A flea market is held here every morning (until 2pm). If it's in session when you arrive, take some time to browse among the stalls.

Rue Blaes brings you to place de la Chapelle and the:

❽ Notre-Dame de la Chapelle Church

This church, with its remarkable Romanesque-Gothic architecture, has always been frequented by famous people—some of whom are commemorated in bas-reliefs and frescoes on the walls. Inside you find the tomb of painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder. The memorial "The Velvet Brueghel" was done by the artist's son, Jan. The artist lived and died near here at no. 132 rue Haute.

Walking away from the church along the rue d'Or and the boulevard de l'Empereur, on your right you come to:

❾ Mont des Arts

On which stands the Palais des Congrès and the national library.

Take rue St. Jean and rue des Eperonniers back to the town center, where you can begin:

WINDING DOWN

A la Mort Subite, rue Montagne-aux-Herbes-Potagères 7 (✆ **02/513-13-18**), is a classic Brussels watering hole across the street from the Galeries Royales St-Hubert, where you can sink a Belgian beer or drink a coffee in memorable surroundings (see "Brussels After Dark" later in this chapter).

13 Sports & Recreation

SPECTATOR SPORTS

HORSE RACING There are three tracks in the Brussels area: **Boitsfort,** chaussée de la Hulpe 53 (✆ **02/660-85-53;** tram: 94); **Groenendaal,** G.B. Charlielaan 20, Hoeilaart (✆ **02/657-30-63;** train: Hoeilaart); and **Sterrebeek,** du Roy de Blicquylaan 43, Sterrebeek (✆ **02/767-54-75;** tram: 39).

SOCCER The **Maison du Football,** av. Houba de Strooper 145 (✆ **02/477-12-11**), can arrange tickets for international soccer matches if you phone Monday to Friday between 9am and 4:15pm. The local team is FC Anderlecht, which is always in contention for Belgian prizes and usually in the running for European honors as well. During continental tournaments some of the crack European soccer squads can often be seen in action in Brussels.

RECREATION

There's a wide variety of facilities—tennis and squash courts, Olympic swimming pool, gymnasium, and martial arts instruction—at the **Centre Sportif de Woluwe-St-Pierre,** av. Salome 2 (✆ **02/773-18-20**).

BOWLING Leading bowling alleys are **Bowling Crosly Brunswick,** quai du Foin 43 (✆ **02/217-28-01**), and **Bowling Crosly Empereur,** bd. de l'Empereur 36 (✆ **02/512-08-74**).

HORSEBACK RIDING For information on riding stables, contact the **Fédération Royale Belge des Sports Equestres,** av. Houba de Strooper 156 (✆ **02/478-50-56**).

ICE-SKATING There's ice-skating from September to May at **Forest National,** av. du Globe 36 (✆ **02/345-16-11;** bus: 48 or 54), and **Poseidon,** av. des Vaillants 4, Woluwe-St-Lambert (✆ **02/762-16-33;** Métro: Tomberg).

14 Shopping

Brussels is not the place to come looking for bargains. On the whole it's rather expensive, though no more so than neighboring big cities like Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. Still, there are reasonable prices to be found, and even bargains. A lot depends on where and when you shop. As a general rule, the upper city around avenue Louise and Porte de Namur is more expensive than the lower city around rue Neuve and the city-center shopping galleries around La Monnaie and place de Brouckère. But this is not a fixed rule. For example, rue Haute, in the upper city, is generally inexpensive, while the Galeries Royales St-Hubert, in the lower city, is generally expensive. In any case, the words to look for are *Soldes* and *Solden* (meaning "Sales" in French and Dutch, respectively), and the even better *Liquidation Totale* and *Totaal Uitverkoop,* spreading the good news that "Everything Must Go."

Store hours are generally 9 or 10am to 6pm Monday to Saturday. On Friday evening many city-center stores, particularly department stores, stay open until 8 or 9pm. A useful source of shopping information is the weekly English-language magazine the *Bulletin,* which keeps tabs on the latest shopping ideas and trends, reviews individual stores, and carries advertising.

SHOPPING PROMENADES

Many of Brussels's most interesting stores are clustered along certain promenades or arcades. You can enjoy a stroll along modern shopping promenades, the busiest of which is pedestrian-only **rue Neuve,** which starts at place de la Monnaie and extends north to place Rogier; this busy and popular area is home to many boutiques, big department stores like Inno and H&M, and several modern malls including the giant City 2 mall. **Boulevard Anspach,** which runs from the Stock Exchange up to place de Brouckère, is home to a number of fashion boutiques, chocolate stores, and electronic-appliance stores. The **Anspach Center** (near place de la Monnaie) is a shopping mall.

One of Europe's oldest "malls," the glass-roofed **Galeries Royales St-Hubert** ★ (Métro: Gare Centrale) is a light and airy arcade hosting boutiques, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, upmarket bookstores, a theater and a movie theater, and street musicians playing classical music. Built in Italian neo-Renaissance style and opened in 1847, architect Pierre Cluysenaer's gallery offers shopping with a touch of class and is well worth strolling through even if you have no intention of even looking in a store window. The elegant, glass-roofed gallery of

Belgian Specialties: Chocolate & More

Lace is the overwhelming favorite purchase in Brussels, followed by crystal, jewelry, antiques, and pewter. Chocolate, beer, and other foods are more economical. Belgians know a thing or two about chocolate. If you have a sweet tooth, you'll feel you're in heaven when you see Brussels's famous chocolate stores, filled with sumptuous soft-centered handmade pralines, from around 12€ ($15) a kilogram (2¼ lb.). Just ask anyone who has ever bitten into one of those devilish little creations—sold by Wittamer, Nihoul, Cornez, Neuhaus, Léonidas, and . . . well, it's a long list. So addictive are they that they really should be sold with a government health warning. You'll find some of the finest confections at **Chocolatier Mary** (see "Shopping A to Z" below).

Lace is another old favorite that's widely available in the city, particularly in and around the Grand-Place. Buy from **Maison Antoine** or **Manufacture Belge de Dentelle** (see "Shopping A to Z" below).

For beers like *gueuze, kriek,* and *faro,* among the 450 or so different Belgian beers, head for the great bar **A la Mort Subite** (see "Bars" under "Brussels After Dark," later in this chapter).

Other traditional products of Brussels include *geneva* (gin), of which there are some 270 brands produced by 70 distilleries; crystal, particularly superb Val-Saint-Lambert crystal from Liège; ceramics; jewelry; hand-beaten copper or bronze; and even diamonds, though Brussels is nowhere near as sparkling in this respect as Antwerp. And in souvenir stores you'll find replicas of *Manneken-Pis,* so you can bring the little guy home with you.

three connected wings—Galerie du Roi, Galerie de la Reine, and Galerie des Princes—was the forerunner of other city arcades like the Burlington in London. The Galeries Royales St-Hubert is just north of the Grand-Place, between rue du Marché-aux-Herbes and rue de l'Ecuyer, and is split by rue de Bouchers. There are entrances on each of these streets.

Some of the trendiest boutiques are on rue Antoine-Dansaert, across from the Bourse. An interesting street for window-shopping, rue des Eperonniers, near the Grand-Place, hosts many small stores selling antiques, toys, old books, and clothing. The **Galerie Agora** (off of the Grand-Place) offers a wide variety of modestly priced merchandise, including leather goods, clothing, souvenirs, records, and jewelry.

Avenue Louise attracts those in search of world-renowned, high-quality goods from such stores as Cartier, Burberry's, Louis Vuitton, and Valentino.

OUTDOOR MARKETS

At the Vieux-Marché flea market on place du Jeu-de-Balle, a large square in the Marolles district, you can find some exceptional decorative items, many recycled from the homes of the "recently deceased," as well as unusual postcards, clothing, and household goods. So you should be able to snap up a bargain on everything from the weird to the wonderful. The market is held daily 7am to 2pm. After its closing time, you can hunt around in the leftovers for bizarre things that nobody wanted at any price.

Every weekend the place du Grand-Sablon hosts a fine **antiques market.** The salesmanship is low-key, the interest pure, the prices not unreasonable (don't expect bargains though), and the quality of the merchandise—which includes silverware, pottery, paintings, and jewelry—is high. The market is open Saturday 9am to 6pm and Sunday 9am to 2pm.

The Grand-Place has a daily **Flower Market.** Nearby, at the top end of rue du Marché-aux-Herbes, in a square loosely called the Agora, there's a weekend **Crafts Market,** with lots of fine specialized jewelry and other items, mostly inexpensive.

The area around the Gare du Midi is the site of the vast **Sunday Market,** which lasts from 6am to 1pm. It features a large number of Middle Eastern and south European merchants who offer food, clothing, and household items and odds and ends at low cost, as well as unusual items from their home areas. You can find many excellent food bargains, making it a perfect place to gather provisions for a few days. Because many of the merchants are of Arab origin, the scene resembles a casbah. Hold onto your wallet because the market attracts pickpockets. (Don't park in this area on a Saturday evening, planning to leave your car there on Sunday—it will be towed for sure.)

From mid-May to September, painters, sculptors, potters, photographers, and other artists sell their work—and some of them produce it too—at the **Marché d'Art,** Parvis St-Pierre, Uccle. The market is open on Sunday from 10am to 1pm.

Two weekends before Christmas the **European Union Christmas Market** takes place in the Grand-Place. For more information see the box, "Christmas in the Grand-Place," earlier in this chapter.

SHOPPING A TO Z

Here's a short list of my personal recommendations, which is only a small sampling of Brussels's best shopping.

ART

Ma Maison de Papier Owner Marie-Laurence Bernard is an enthusiast for vintage posters—she has written three books on the subject—that do more than hide a crack on your bathroom wall. You can buy any kind of poster here, from a 1930s cigarette ad or a reproduction Toulouse-Lautrec (What have you got Toulouse?) to original Art Nouveau and Art Deco works by Belgian, French, and other masters of the genre. Galerie de la rue de Ruysbroeck 6, rue de Ruysbroeck (off place du Grand-Sablon). ✆ **020/512-22-49.** Tram: 92, 93, or 94 to Petit-Sablon.

BOOKS

City Press Center This international press store has a large selection of English-language periodicals and paperback books. Open Monday to Saturday 8am to 8pm and Sunday 9am to 8pm. bd. Anspach 67. ✆ **02/511-11-22.** Métro: Bourse.

Waterstones It's not so easy to find a wide selection of English-language books in Brussels, but the major British bookstore chain does have a full-size branch here, which sells magazines and newspapers as well as books. The books, however, usually are 30% to 60% more than in Britain. bd. Adolphe Max 71. ✆ **02/219-27-08.** Métro: Rogier.

Tips An Affordable Wine Source

If you're planning to buy wine by the bottle, don't be fooled into the idea that you have to go to some expensive wine store to get something worthwhile. The midprice **Delhaize** supermarket chain has built up an enviable reputation and a loyal local following for the quality of its wine department. Delhaize's buyers look for good value in all price categories and have an adventurous streak that makes them look beyond just the classic names. There are Delhaize supermarkets all over Brussels (and Belgium). Ask at your hotel desk for the nearest branch and try it out.

CHILDREN

Boutique de Tintin Forget computer games and other electronic toys. If you need to buy a gift for the kids, take home some Tintin mementos from this excellent, if somewhat pricey, store. rue de la Colline 13. ✆ **02/514-45-50.** Métro: Gare Centrale.

EURO-STUFF

Eurotempo One of the most surprising marketing phenomena of recent years has been the popularity of the European Union's symbol: a blue flag with a circle of 12 stars. At Eurotempo you can find this logo on an astonishing range of products: umbrellas, T-shirts, pens, golf balls, watches, hats, knives, towels—you name it. Where better to buy Euro-stuff than in the capital of Europe? rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 84. ✆ **02/502-37-47.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

FASHION & APPAREL

Delvaux This local company makes and sells some of the best—and priciest—handbags and leather goods in Belgium. Galerie de la Reine 31. ✆ **02/512-71-98.** Métro: Gare Centrale Station or Bourse.

Ganterie Italienne This is a glove store with Italian style, selling attractive hand wear that keeps out the winter cold. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 6pm. Galerie de la Reine 3 (off of the Grand-Place). ✆ **02/512-75-38.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Kaat Tilley This fancifully designed boutique stocks chiffon and silk creations. Open Monday 10am to 6pm, Tuesday to Friday 10am to 6:30pm, and Saturday 10:30am to 6:30pm. Galerie du Roi 4 (off of the Grand-Place). ✆ **02/514-07-63.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Olivier Strelli This top-rated Belgian fashion designer is just one of several big names with boutiques in this area. His store is strong on elegant, ready-to-wear items. av. Louise 72. ✆ **02/511-21-34.** Métro: Louise.

FLOWERS

Les Fleurs Isabelle de Baecker ★ This superb flower store in a superb Art Nouveau location is just the place for that important bouquet. rue Royale 13. ✆ **02/217-26-69.** Métro: Botanique.

FOOD & WINES

Chocolatier Mary ★ Supplier of pralines to the Belgian royal court—which tells you right away that these are no plain chocolates—Mary's is a small store but its wares look every bit as good as a visual spectacle as they taste. rue Royal 73. ✆ **02/217-45-00.** Métro: Parc.

Tips Tax Saver

If you spend over 125€ ($144) in some stores, and you are not a resident of the European Union, you can get a tax refund when you leave the E.U. Stores that display a TAX-FREE SHOPPING sign provide visitors who are not residents in the European Union the form they need for recovering some of the 21.5% value-added tax (TVA) on purchases. At the airport, show the Customs officials your purchase and receipt and they'll stamp the form. You mail this form back to the Belgian Tax Bureau (the address is on the form) or bring it directly to the Best Change office at the airport, which charges a small commission but gives you an on-the-spot refund.

Dandoy ★★ Dandoy is the place for sweet-toothed fans of old-fashioned cookies-'n-cakes and other treats. Try the traditional Belgian house specialties: spicy *speculoos* cookies (made with brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and almonds, and baked in wooden molds), and *pain à la grecque* (thin, spicy caramelized, sugary flaky pastries). rue au Beurre 31. ✆ **02/511-03-26.** Métro: Bourse.

De Boe ★ Don't miss this small store near the Fish Market. It has a superb selection of roasted and blended coffee and wines in all price categories, as well as an array of specialty crackers, nuts, spices, teas, and gourmet snacks, many of which are canned, making them suitable for transport home. Open Tuesday to Saturday 9am to 1pm and 2 to 6pm. rue de Flandre 36. ✆ **02/511-13-73.** Métro: Ste-Catherine.

Neuhaus This chocolatier sells some of the best of the dangerously delicious Belgian handmade chocolates. You can buy gift pralines here. Galerie de la Reine 25. ✆ **02/502-59-14.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Wittamer Wittamer makes some of the best handmade pralines in the world. Their rolls, breads, pastries, and cakes have also been winning fans here since 1910. place du Grand-Sablon 12. ✆ **02/512-37-42.** Tram: 92 or 93.

LACE

Maison Antoine This lace boutique is one of the best in Brussels and surely has the best location, a former guild house where Victor Hugo lived in 1852. The quality is superb, the service friendly, and the prices decent. Open daily 10am to 7pm. Grand-Place 26. ✆ **02/512-14-59.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

Manufacture Belge de Dentelle This is a good source for top-quality handmade Belgian lace. Galerie de la Reine 6–8. ✆ **02/511-44-77.** Métro: Gare Centrale or Bourse.

MULTIMEDIA

FNAC This good-value book, electronics, and photo chain has a branch in the City 2 multistory shopping mall off of rue Neuve. It also sells concert tickets. City 2. ✆ **02/209-22-11.** Métro: Rogier.

TOYS

La Trotinette Reach back here to a kinder and gentler era of children's toys, with tin cars, wooden soldiers, and Barbie dolls from the 1950s. One of its more distinguished recent customers was Bill Clinton. rue des Eperonniers 4. ✆ **02/511-00-41.** Métro: Gare Centrale.

15 Brussels After Dark

Brussels is not known for its nightlife, but that's partly because it's overshadowed by the worldwide reputations of neighboring capitals like Paris and Amsterdam. Nightlife is actually alive and well in Brussels, and if the range is inevitably thinner than in bigger cities, the quality is not.

Nighttime in Brussels can be just about anything you want it to be. Cocktail bars vary from the old, established, almost clubby type, to the avant-garde, to the bizarre; and there are also cafe theaters, regular theater in season (Sept–May), a traditional puppet theater, cafe cabarets, dinner shows, nightclubs, concerts, ballet, opera, and jazz clubs.

For current information on after-dark entertainment during your visit, consult the **Brussels International Tourism** office in the Town Hall, Grand-Place, Brussels (✆ **02/513-89-40**), or buy the weekly English-language magazine the ***Bulletin,*** which has an extensive "What's On" section.

You can order tickets for performing-arts venues from the **Central Booking Office** (✆ **0800/21-221**), open Monday to Friday from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 10am to 7pm. The tourist office in the Town Hall on the Grand-Place (see "Visitor Information" in chapter 3) can reserve concert/theater tickets for 1€ ($1.25).

THE PERFORMING ARTS

OPERA & BALLET An opera house in the grand style, the **Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie** ★★, place de la Monnaie (✆ **02/229-12-11;** www.lamonnaie.be; Métro: De Brouckère), founded in the 17th century, is home to the Opéra National and l'Orchestre Symphonique de la Monnaie. Belgium's 1830 war of independence broke out during a performance at this graceful neoclassical theater—so you never can tell what an evening at the opera has in store. Ballet performances are also presented here. The resident modern-dance company, Anne Theresa de Keersmaeker's Group Rosas, is noted for its original moves.

CLASSICAL MUSIC **Bozar,** rue Ravenstein 23 (✆ **02/507-82-00;** Métro: Gare Centrale)—formerly the elegantly named **Palais des Beaux-Arts** until some bright spark came up with the idea of trendifying it—is home to Belgium's National Orchestra. Concerts are also performed at the **Cirque Royal,** rue de l'Enseignement 81 (✆ **02/218-20-15;** Métro: Parc), which was formerly a real circus but is now a venue for music, opera, and ballet; and at **Le Botanique,** rue Royale 236 (✆ **02/218-37-32;** Métro: Botanique), which generally focuses on small-scale modern and avant-garde performances, not only of classical music but also of jazz and other forms.

THEATERS Brussels theater is quite important among French-speaking countries, with more than 30 theaters presenting performances in French, Flemish, and (occasionally) English. Among the most important are the **Théâtre**

Moments **Sound & Light**

Be sure to take in the *son-et-lumière* on summer evenings on the Grand-Place. This sound-and-light show, in which a series of colored lamps on the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall) are switched on and off in sequence to a piece of appropriately grand music, is admittedly kind of kitsch. But who cares? It's also magical.

Royal du Parc, rue de la Loi 3 (✆ **02/505-30-30;** www.theatreduparc.be; Métro: Parc), for classic and contemporary drama and comedies; **Théâtre Royal des Galeries,** Galerie du Roi 32 (✆ **02/512-04-07**), with a wide variety of offerings, including drama, comedy, and musicals; the Art Deco–style **Théâtre du Résidence Palace,** rue de la Loi 155 (✆ **02/231-03-05**); **Le Botanique,** rue Royale 236 (✆ **02/218-37-32**), which inclines toward the experimental in mostly French theater; and the **Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg,** Delaunoystraat 58, 1080 Brussels (✆ **02/412-70-70**), a neo-Renaissance–style building dating from 1887 that brings the world's theatrical highlights to the city in Dutch.

PUPPET THEATER

Théâtre Royal de Toone ★ Look for the small wooden sign in the tiny alleyway—impasse Schuddeveld—to reach this theater, in an upstairs room in a bistro of the same name. It's the latest in the Toone line of puppet theaters, which dates back to the early 1800s—the title being passed from one puppet master to the next—and it may be the most popular theater in Brussels. At Toone, puppet master José Géal presents his adaptation of such classic tales as *The Three Musketeers, Faust,* and *Hamlet* in the Brussels dialect, Brussels Vloms, but also in English, French, Dutch, and German. In any case, language should present no difficulties since it's easy to follow the action on stage. Impasse Schuddeveld 6, Petite rue des Bouchers 21. ✆ **02/513-54-86.** Ticket prices and performance times vary; check in advance.

ROCK CONCERTS

Forest National This is the main venue for big rock concerts in Brussels (along with spectacles like *Holiday on Ice*). Among recent acts at this writing have been Bryan Adams and the Beastie Boys, and the pop musical *Mamma*

Puppet Shows: A Belgian Passion

A special word is in order about a special sort of theater—that of the wooden marionettes that have entertained Belgians for centuries. In times past, puppet theaters numbered in the hundreds nationwide (Brussels alone had 15), and the plays were much like our modern-day soap operas. The story lines went on and on, sometimes for generations, and working-class audiences returned night after night to keep up with the *Dallas* of the times. Performances were based on folklore, legends, or political satire.

Specific marionette characters came to personify their home cities: a cheeky ragamuffin named Woltje (Little Walloon) was from Brussels; Antwerp had the cross-eyed, earthy ne'er-do-well Schele; Pierke, from Ghent, was modeled on the traditional Italian clown; and Liège's Tchantchès stood only 41 centimeters (16 in.) high and always appeared with patched trousers, a tasseled floppy hat, and his constant companion, the sharp-tongued Nanesse (Agnes).

Today a few Belgian puppet theaters still survive and their popularity has increased in recent years after a decline following World War II, when bombing raids severely damaged many theaters and destroyed many marionettes.

Mia, based on the Abba story. Smaller-scale shows are likely to go to the Cirque Royal (see "Classical Music" above). av. du Globe 36. ✆ **02/347-03-55.** www.forestnational.be. Train: Forest-Est.

CABARET & DINNER DANCING

Le Huchier, place du Grand-Sablon (✆ **02/512-27-11**), open until the wee hours of the morning, features marvelous Hungarian and gypsy music, as well as jazz and just about any other type of music you request, and also offers light snacks and drinks. **Le Pavillon,** in the Brussels Sheraton Hotel, place Rogier 3 (✆ **02/224-32-05**), provides live music for dinner dancing on Friday and Saturday.

JAZZ & BLUES CLUBS

Jazz has taken a hit in Brussels in recent years, and some of the best-loved spots have bitten the dust. Still, some old places remain, and new ones have sprung up. **Phil's Jazz Kitchen Café,** rue Haute 189 (✆ **02/513-95-88**), a relaxed bar with good atmosphere, has jazz or other music most nights of the week, and a jam session on Wednesday. **L'Archiduc,** rue Antoine Dansaert 6 (✆ **02/512-06-52;** Métro: Bourse), had the brilliant idea to put on a sophisticated program of jazz on Saturday, aimed at worn-out shoppers, beginning at 5pm, then went one better by repeating the idea (minus the shopping) on Sunday. **The New York Jazz Club,** chaussée de Charleroi 5 (✆ **02/534-85-09;** Métro: Louise), is maybe a little too cool and refined for its own good, but it's willing to be experimental and is well worth checking out. The **Marcus Mingus Jazz Spot,** impasse de la Fidélité 10–11 (✆ **02/502-02-97;** Métro: Gare Centrale), lights up jazz, Brazilian, Latin, blues, funk, or whatever, and attracts top local performers and an occasional international name, Tuesday to Sunday at 10pm. For those who like their licks a little more restrained, there's a jazz brunch at the Airport Sheraton Hotel, facing the terminal building (✆ **02/725-10-00**), every Sunday noon to 3pm.

During the 3-day, mid-May Brussels **Jazz Marathon** (✆ **02/456-04-75**), more than 125 concerts cover all known jazz forms at outdoor venues like the Grand-Place, place du Grand-Sablon, and at clubs, bars, and cultural venues around town. Outdoor concerts are free; a pass for all indoor concerts is 14€ ($18), and 12€ ($15) if you book ahead.

DANCE CLUBS

Nothing in life changes quite so fast as the "in" discos. Still, there are some that have stood the test of time—and that, of course, makes them anathema to genuine disco hounds. Since the turnover rate is so high, be sure to check locally to see if the following are still in operation before setting out for a night of dancing. The most sophisticated dance club in Brussels is **Griffin's Club** in the Royal Windsor Hotel, rue Duquesnoy 5 (✆ **02/505-55-55;** Métro: Gare Centrale), which is in full swing every night except Sunday. The **Mirano Continental,** chaussée de Louvain 38 (✆ **02/227-39-70**), is more of a dance hall than a disco, a classy place for those whose wildest years are a few years behind them yet who still like to enjoy themselves. **Nostalgia Club,** rue de la Fourche 49 (✆ **02/513-32-91**), is something similar, with hits from the 1960s and 1970s at the top of the bill.

Le Sparrow, rue Duquesnoy 18 (✆ **02/512-66-22;** Métro: Gare Centrale), just off of the Grand-Place, always seems on the verge of going out of style, yet never quite gets there, even if it has lost the wild and wonderful cachet of its earlier days—its location just off of the Grand-Place undoubtedly helps, as does

its consistently up-to-date approach to the music. **Cartagena,** rue du Marché-au-Charbon 70 (✆ **02/502-59-08;** Métro: Bourse), is as hot as a night in, well, Cartagena, and dispenses drinks and music from all over Latin America. If only techno will do, **Le Fuse,** rue Blaes 208 (✆ **02/511-97-89;** bus: 20 or 48), is the place—on the first Friday of every month it reinvents itself as the women-only **Pussy Lounge,** and every Sunday as the men-only **La Démence.**

BARS

Now you're talking. Bars are where Brussels lives. It's hard to be disappointed, whether you just pop in to a neighborhood watering hole where a *chope* or *pintje* (a glass of beer) will set you back a mere 2€ ($2.50), or whether you prefer to fork out several times as much in one of the trendier places.

The city's oldest cafe, in a 1690 building, **Le Roy d'Espagne,** Grand-Place 1 (✆ **02/513-08-07;** Métro: Gare Centrale), accommodates patrons in several areas. In addition to the outdoor tables, you can drink in a room preserving a 17th-century Flemish interior—a masterpiece of wooden architecture with a wooden walkway, wooden beams above, and a fireplace covered by a black metal hood. The fourth-floor view of the Grand-Place is spectacular. It's open daily from 10am to 1am.

Unique, to say the least, is a Brussels favorite, **A la Mort Subite,** rue Montagne-aux-Herbes-Potagères 7 (✆ **02/513-13-18;** Métro: Gare Centrale), a bistro of rather special character whose name translates to "Sudden Death," which is also the name of one of the beers you can buy here. Don't worry. The name is just a name—it comes from a dice game regulars used to play. And you'll probably survive in this fine old Brussels cafe, which appeals to an eclectic cross section of Brussels society, from little old ladies to bank managers, dancers and musicians from the top cultural venues, students—oh yes, and to tourists as well. Brussels-born *chansonier* Jacques Brel hung out here. The decor consists of stained-glass motifs, old photographs, paintings, and prints on the walls, and plain wooden chairs and tables on the floor. Specialties are traditional Brussels beers: *gueuze, lambic, faro,* and *kriek,* and abbey brews like Chimay, Maredsous, and Grimbergen. The staff's attitude can take a little getting used to, especially if you take more than 3 seconds flat to decide what you want. If you know straight away, you'll have a friend for life, or at any rate, for the evening.

While we're on the subject of death, you can drink beer from a skull-shaped pitcher in **Le Cercueil (The Coffin),** rue des Harengs 10–12 (✆ **02/512-30-77;** Métro: Gare Centrale), while sitting in purple gloom at a casket-turned-table, being serenaded by funereal music.

In a quite different vein is **La Fleur en Papier Doré** ★, rue des Alexiens 55 (✆ **02/511-16-59;** Métro: Bourse), in a 16th-century house. From its beginnings in 1846, this bistro and pub has been a mecca for poets and writers. Even now, about once a month, young Brussels poets gather here informally for poetry readings—the dates vary, but you might inquire by phone, or better yet, just drop by and ask in person. This is a wonderfully atmospheric old pub, much like a social club, where patrons gather for good conversation and welcome any and all newcomers. The place also serves what is possibly the best onion soup in Brussels, a great late-night snack.

The following are only a few of the many Brussels pubs and bistros worthy of recommendation. **Au Bon Vieux Temps,** rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 12 (✆ **02/217-26-26;** Métro: Bourse), hidden away at the end of a narrow alleyway, is a gloomily atmospheric old tavern that seems to hearken back to a bygone era. You should try the appropriately named Duvel (Devil) beer here—just go easy,

that's all. **A l'Imaige Nostre-Dame,** impasse des Cadeaux (✆ **02/219-42-49;** Métro: Bourse), off of rue du Marché-aux-Herbes 6, is a good, quiet place to drink and read or reflect if you're alone, or to converse with a companion without having to compete with a blaring jukebox.

Le Cirio, rue de la Bourse 16–18 (✆ **02/512-13-95;** Métro: Bourse), is across the road from the Stock Exchange, and indeed many of the bar's customers look like they've just made a killing on the stock market and have retired to a state of genteel splendor. And what better place to do it in? Le Cirio is a quiet, refined sort of place to sip your beer, in attractive surroundings that make the whole exercise seem worthwhile (try to avoid getting bitten by the patrons' poodles). **Toone VII,** impasse Schuddeveld 6, Petite rue des Bouchers 21 (✆ **02/513-54-86;** Métro: Gare Centrale), is the home of the puppet theater and an artistic hangout.

Art Nouveau design from 1904 by master Paul Hamesse that incorporates a plaster-covered interior wall mimicking a rock face and an extensive range of Belgian beers are just two good reasons for visiting trendy bar-brasserie **De Ultieme Hallucinatie,** rue Royale 316 (✆ **02/217-06-14;** Métro: Botanique). You sit in little booths on 1930s railroad station benches designed by Henry Van de Velde or at a long bar. In summertime you can tan while you quaff on a courtyard terrace at the back. Salads, snacks, and full meals are available in the brasserie. I'd give the attached restaurant, worthy but dull and expensive, a miss.

Shock and horror reverberated through the city a few years back when the legendary 1904 Art Nouveau tavern located across from the Bourse in what were private mansions in the late 1800s, **Le Falstaff,** rue Henri Maus 17–25 (✆ **02/511-87-89;** Métro: Bourse), went bankrupt and closed. Reopened under new management, it has shed its former, famously vain waitstaff and slipped a few notches on the hip scale as a result. If such considerations don't worry you, there's still the same stunning decor, enlivened with a dash of Art Deco and rococo, stained-glass scenes in the style of Pieter Brueghel the Elder depicting Shakespeare's Falstaff tales, and reasonably priced brasserie food.

Rick's, av. Louise 344 (✆ **02/640-03-05;** tram: 93 or 94), brings a touch of Humphrey Bogart and Ernest Hemingway, accompanied by American and Mexican food, to the stylish avenue Louise. The decor might give you the creeps at **Halloween,** rue des Grands-Carmes 10 (✆ **02/514-12-56;** Métro: Anneessens), where gargoyles, devils, and other assorted creatures from the darker recesses of the mind help create an unforgettable ambience. Fortunately, it's also a pretty good bar. Something sad has happened to the painfully chic denizens of **L'Archiduc,** rue Antoine Dansaert 6 (✆ **02/512-06-52;** Métro: Bourse)—they've loosened up a little. Not much, mind you—just enough so that you don't see a hundred lips curling with disdain when you enter wearing clothes that were de rigueur last week instead of today. Try making funny faces at them to see if you can't get one to crack a smile.

"As sophisticated as a sidewalk hotdog," was local magazine the *Bulletin*'s take on faux-American bar **Conway's,** av. de la Toison d'Or 10 (✆ **02/511-26-68;** Métro: Louise), whose proprietors promise you "warm beer, cold food, ugly chicks, and fat bastards." Is there one single attraction about this place? Well, there's a singles attraction. On weekends it's hot with the hot and unattached who, with nothing so far from their thoughts as a quiet evening, pile into a long, gloomy, music-throbbing interior decorated with black-and-white photographs of old Hollywood movie stars. Tex-Mex snacks help to keep the sap high.

Rock your socks off into the wee-est, smallest hours at **Rock Classic,** Marché-au-Charbon 55 (✆ **02/512-15-47;** Métro: Bourse), where 4 decades of great music are on tap and young spirits down strong spirits packaged in drinker-friendly cocktails. Some patrons take time out for table-soccer, some, strangely in such a place, kick back at chessboards set in tables, and yet others like to get up close and personal in the darkened television room.

GAY & LESBIAN BARS

Rue des Riches-Claires and **rue du Marché-au-Charbon** host some gay and lesbian bars. **Macho 2,** rue du Marché-au-Charbon 108 (✆ **02/513-56-67;** Métro: Bourse), a block from rue des Riches-Claires, houses a gay men's sauna, pool, steam room, and cafe. It's open Monday to Thursday from noon to 2am, Friday and Saturday from noon to 4am, and Sunday from noon to midnight. Admission is 12€ ($15) or 8€ ($10) for men under 25 (on Thurs it's 8€/$10 for everyone), but students enter at all times for 5€ ($6.25). **Le Fuse** and **Le Sparrow** (see above) both have gay nights.

For more information, contact **Infor Homo,** av. de Roodebeek 57 (✆ **02/733-10-24;** Métro: Diamant), open Tuesday to Friday from 8am to 6pm. Or stop by the gay and lesbian community center, **Telsquels,** rue du Marché-au-Charbon 81 (✆ **02/512-45-87;** Métro: Bourse), open Saturday to Thursday from 5pm to 2am and Friday from 8am to 4am.

MOVIES

Since most movies in Brussels are shown in the original language, you'll always be able to find many English-language films in the theaters. Major cinemas in the city center, several of them multiplexes, are: **Actor's Studio,** Petite rue des Bouchers 16 (✆ **02/512-16-96**); **Arenberg/Galeries,** de la Reine 26 (✆ **02/512-80-63**); **Aventure,** rue des Frippiers 17 (✆ **02/219-17-48**); **UGC Toison d'Or,** avenue de la Toisin d'Or (✆ **0900/10-440**); and **UGC de Brouckère,** place de la Brouckère 38 (✆ **0900/10-440**). **Kinepolis,** bd. du Centenaire 20 (✆ **0900/352-41**), is the best equipped and the biggest, with 26 screens, including an IMAX screen. Part of the Bruparck recreation complex beside the Atomium, Kinepolis is likely to have something for everyone. Most movies shown here are big releases, usually from Hollywood, which is no doubt the main reason why the place is so popular. **Nova,** rue d'Arenberg 3 (✆ **02/511-24-77**), is an art-house cinema. The **Musée du Cinema,** rue Baron Horta 9 (✆ **02/507-83-70**), often features little-seen classic films from the past.

Tips Belgian Brews Pack a Punch

Be warned: Belgian beers are stronger than their American counterparts—alcohol content can be as high as 12%. Try a rich, dark Trappist ale brewed by monks from Chimay, Orval, Rochefort, Sint-Benedictus, Westmalle, and Westvleteren monasteries. Brussels is well known for its *lambic* beers, which use naturally occurring yeast for fermentation, are often flavored with fruit, and come in bottles with champagne-type corks. Unlike any other beer, they're more akin to a sweet sparkling wine. *Gueuze,* a blend of young and aged lambic beers, is one of the least sweet. If you prefer something sweeter, try raspberry-flavored *framboise* or cherry-flavored *kriek*. *Faro* is a low-alcohol beer, sometimes sweetened or lightly spiced.

Tips More Special Events

July 21, **National Day,** is marked by various celebrations, including fireworks and a military parade past the Royal Palace; July 21 to August 20 brings the bustling **Brussels Fair** near Gare du Midi; on August 9 the Bruxellois celebrate the 1213 victory of Brussels over Leuven by planting a slightly misnamed **Meiboom (Maytree)** at the intersection of rue des Sables and rue du Marais, as bands and other activities celebrate the event.

OFFBEAT BRUSSELS

It's no accident that René Magritte lived in Brussels. He sat at his easel in a business suit, painting comically unsettling pictures of pipes that aren't pipes and mirrors that reflect the back of someone's head. Forget the myth of Brussels's sobriety: Bruxellois are fun-loving people.

For some unconventional diversions, you can arrange to tour the **sewers** by calling ✆ **02/513-8587,** or play Russian roulette with falling arrows at vertical archery practice in **Parc Josaphat** (Schaerbeek)—the archers gather at unpredictable times, though any sunny weekend afternoon in summer is a good bet. Otherwise, call the tourist office for possible dates.

16 Side Trips from Brussels

The lovely Brabant countryside around Brussels offers scenic beauty, as well as several sightseeing attractions well worth the short trip.

WATERLOO

10km (6 miles) S of Brussels

Europe's Gettysburg, the battle that ended Napoleon's empire was fought on rolling farmland near the town of **Waterloo,** just south of Brussels. On June 18, 1815, 72,000 British, Dutch, Belgian, and German troops, aided before the day's end by around 40,000 Prussians, defeated the mighty Napoleon Bonaparte and his 76,000 French, leaving 40,000 dead and wounded on the field. Napoleon survived, but his attempt to rebuild his empire was crushed; he was exiled to the island of St. Helena, where he died 6 years later.

The battlefield remains much as it was on that June day. A stretch of rolling farmland dotted with stoutly built manor-farmhouses several miles to the south of Waterloo, it seems like an absurdly small stretch of real estate to have been the stage on which an empire was lost and Europe's destiny for a century ahead was decided. Not too much has changed here since French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte came to call and found England's duke of Wellington drawn up to receive him on a range of slight hills.

From Brussels, bus W departs twice hourly for Waterloo from Gare du Midi (Métro: Gare du Midi). The 18km (11-mile) ride takes 50 minutes and costs 3€ ($3.75). The bus stops at both the Wellington Museum in Waterloo itself, and at the battlefield visitor center south of the town. By car from Brussels, go south on the ring road (R0) to exit 27 for Waterloo, and N5 south to the battlefield; follow the signs for *Butte du Lion.*

Before touring the battlefield, you should stop by the **Centre Visiteur (Visitor Center),** route du Lion 252–254 (✆ **02/385-19-12;** www.waterloo1815.

Tips Action This Day

The next reenactment of the Battle of Waterloo, a spectacular, 5-yearly event that features thousands of uniformed participants from around the world, is due to take place on June 19, 2005—the Sunday nearest to the battle's June 18 anniversary. ***Note:*** The date had not been confirmed at this writing, so you should call ahead to the Visitor Center before going. The previous day, Saturday, when the "troops" are assembling, is also an interesting time to be in Waterloo and at the battlefield.

be), where an audiovisual presentation on the tactical background, plus an extract from Sergei Bondarchuk's epic movie *Waterloo,* will afford you some idea of the battle's titanic scale. You'll find "rations" at a nearby cluster of traditional cafes and restaurants, which have names like Le Hussard, Bivouac de l'Empereur, and Les Alliés—the victors Wellington and Blücher don't get much of a look in. There are also souvenir stores selling everything from Napoleonic corkscrews to hand-painted model soldiers.

The 360-degree, panoramic view of the theater of war from the top of the great **Butte du Lion (Lion Mound),** a conical hill surmounted by a bronze lion, next to the Visitor Center, is worth the 226-step climb, though it takes an active imagination to fill the peaceful farmland with slashing cavalry charges, thundering artillery, and 200,000 colorfully uniformed, struggling soldiers.

Across the road from the Visitor Center is the **Musée des Cires (Waxworks Museum),** where Napoleon, Wellington, Blücher, and other key participants appear as rather tatty wax figures. Also next to the center is the **Panorama de la Bataille (Battlefield Panorama),** featuring a painted cyclorama of the massive French cavalry charge led by Marshal Ney. One of the few remaining 19th-century cycloramas in the world, it was a sensation in the precinema era.

These three sites are open daily April to September from 9:30am to 6:30pm and October to March from 10am to 5pm; closed January 1 and December 25. Admission to the Visitor Center is free; the audiovisual presentation is 5€ ($6.25) for adults, 4.20€ ($5.25) for seniors and students, and 3.35€ ($4.20) for children ages 6 to 12; admission to the Lion Mound is 1€ ($1.25) for adults, and .50€ (65¢) for children ages 6 to 12; admission to the panorama is 2.75€ ($3.40) for adults, 2€ ($2.50) for seniors and students, and 1.50€ ($1.90) for children ages 6 to 12; a combination ticket is 7.45€ ($9.30) for adults, 6.20€ ($7.75) for seniors and students, and 4.70€ ($5) for children ages 6 to 12; in all cases, children under 6 are free.

A pathway beside the Panorama leads to a memorial to Lieutenant Augustin Demulder, a Belgian soldier who fell in Napoleon's campaign—around this spot Marshal Ney's horsemen surged against unyielding Allied (British, Dutch, Belgian, and Hanoverian) infantry deployed in a square military formation. Farther on, a memorial records the position of British artillery that poured grapeshot into Napoleon's Old Guard during their doomed final assault. A stroll of 15 minutes more brings you to **Hougoumont,** a fortified farmhouse that played a key role in the fighting and still bears the scars of battle. The private owners permit visitors to wander around the grounds.

Beside the crossroads at the Brussels-Charleroi road are monuments to the Belgians and Hanoverians; to Colonel Gordon, Wellington's aide; and to General Picton, shot down at the head of his division. A little way down the

Brussels-Charleroi road is **La Haie–Sainte,** a farmhouse that played a crucial role in Napoleon's defeat by shielding Wellington's center from direct assault.

Though a pleasant-enough suburb of Brussels—and the capital town of Brabant-Walloon (Walloon Brabant) province, **Waterloo** is not really worth going out of your way for—remember that the "Battle of Waterloo" was not actually fought there. But there is the well-ordered **Musée Wellington (Wellington Museum),** chaussée de Bruxelles 147 (✆ **02/354-78-06**), in an old Brabant coaching inn, where you can fill in details about the fighting. This was the duke's headquarters, and it was from here that Wellington sent his historic victory dispatch. The museum is open April to September daily from 9:30am to 6:30pm; November to March daily from 10:30am to 5pm (closed Jan 1 and Dec 25). Admission is 5€ ($6.25) for adults, 4€ ($5) for students and seniors, 1€ ($1.25) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

BEERSEL

9km (5½ miles) SW of Brussels

The only local example of a still-intact **fortified medieval castle** is at Beersel, a little off the Mons road (watch for the signpost). The three-towered 13th-century castle is set in a wooded area and surrounded by a moat, which you cross via drawbridge. Pick up the excellent English-language guidebook at the entrance for a detailed history of the castle and its inhabitants, then wander through its rooms for a trip back through time. End your visit with a stop at the magnificent mausoleum that holds the alabaster effigies of Henry II of Witthem and his wife, Jacqueline de Glimes, who lived here during the early 1400s.

Leafy pathways through the castle grounds make this a favorite rural retreat for Brussels residents, especially during the summer months. At the entrance to the park, you find **Auberge Kasteel Beersel,** Lotstraat 65, Beersel (✆ **02/377-10-47**), a charming rustic restaurant with a decor of dark wood, exposed brick, and accents of copper and brass. In good weather there's service on the shaded outdoor terrace. Light meals (omelets, salads, soups, and sandwiches) are available, as well as complete hot meals for both lunch and dinner. Prices are moderate. If you don't want a meal, you're welcome to stop in just for a relaxing draft of Belgian beer.

GAASBEEK

13km (8 miles) SW of Brussels

The ancestral château of the counts of Egmont is at Gaasbeek, beyond the village of Vlezenbeek. The furnishings of **Kasteel van Gaasbeek,** Kasteelstraat 40 (✆ **02/531-01-30;** www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be), are nothing less than magnificent, as is the castle itself. All the rooms are splendid, and far from presenting a dead "museum" appearance, they create the eerie impression that the counts and their families may come walking through the door any moment. Before each guided tour, there's a slide show that will augment your appreciation of the countless works of art, silver items, religious artifacts, and priceless tapestries you

Fun Fact **The Strain of Command**

At the reenactment of the Battle of Waterloo in 1995, the actor playing Napoleon was so overcome by stress that he suffered a heart attack and was removed from the battlefield by ambulance. Fortunately he survived to "fight" another day.

see in the castle. The castle is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm; the park is open daily from 8am to 8pm (to 6pm Oct–Mar). Admission to the castle is 4.50€ ($5.65) for adults; 2.50€ ($3.15) for seniors, visitors with disabilities, students, and children ages 7 to 18; and free for children under 7. Admission to the park is free. To get there by car from Brussels, take the R0/E19 Brussels ring road west to exit 15A, for Vlezenbeek, and continue through this village to the castle; by public transportation, take De Lijn bus no. 142 (Gaasbeek-Leerbeek) from Brussels's Gare du Midi/Zuidstation, and get out at the Kasteel van Gaasbeek stop.

MECHELEN

16km (10 miles) N of Brussels

Sited on the Dijle River and the Leuven Canal, midway between Brussels and Antwerp, Mechelen is a perfect stop when traveling between those two cities on E19. The town wears its long history well (the Gauls were here as early as 500 B.C.), and its medieval town square evokes the late 1400s and 1500s, when this was a religious, cultural, and artistic center of Europe.

The **Tourist Office,** in the Town Hall on the square (✆ **015/29-76-55;** fax 015/29-76-53; www.mechelen.be), offers guided tours, including one to **St. Rombold's Cathedral** ★★ that includes a climb up the tower to see its famous carillon—at noon, you can hear a brief recital of the bells ringing out over the city. Carillon concerts take place evenings mid-June to August. The **Royal Carillon School** here is the most famous in Europe and possibly in the world, attracting students from all around the globe. If you have an interest in carillons, you might want to visit the **City Museum,** which includes a carillon section, as well as classic and modern paintings and sculpture.

In Tivoli Park there's a **Children's Farm,** as well as a **Bee-Keeping Museum** inside the castle. Children of all ages will love the fairy-tale **Toy Museum,** at Nekkerspoelstraat 21. The Grote Markt reverts to its original purpose on Saturday mornings, when a **street market** is held there, just as it was in medieval times.

Mechelen has been an important center of tapestry weaving since medieval times, and Belgium's magnificent tapestry presented to the United Nations headquarters in New York was woven here. There's a tapestry factory, the **Koninklijke Manufactuur van Wandtapijten (Royal Tapestry Manufacturer),** Schoutetstraat 7 (✆ **015/20-29-05**), still in operation; inquire at the tourist office for arrangements to visit and view their beautiful collection of both antique and modern tapestries.

5

Bruges

Walking around the almost perfectly preserved city of Bruges (Brugge) is like taking a step back in time. From its 13th-century origins as a cloth-manufacturing town to its current incarnation as a tourism mecca, Bruges seems to have changed little. As in a fairy tale, swans glide down the winding canals and the stone houses look like they're made of gingerbread. Even though glass-fronted stores have taken over the ground floors of ancient buildings, and the swans scatter before tour boats chugging along the canals, Bruges has made the transition from medieval to modern with remarkable grace. The town seems revitalized rather than crushed by the tremendous influx of tourists.

In the Middle Ages, Bruges was among the wealthiest cities of Europe. Unlike so many European cities that have had their hearts torn out by war, Bruges has remained unravaged, its glorious monumental buildings intact. UNESCO has recognized the cultural importance of the historic center by awarding it World Heritage status. The city (pop. 115,000, of whom 25,000 live in the old center) is the capital town of West-Vlaanderen (West Flanders) province and the pride and joy of all Flanders. Around four million visitors a year agree that it's the place to see.

Medieval Gothic architecture is the big deal here. Sure, there's a layer of Romanesque; a touch of Renaissance, baroque, and rococo; a dab of neoclassical and neo-Gothic; and a smidgen of Art Nouveau and Art Deco. But Gothic is what Bruges provides, in quantities that come near to numbing the senses—and likely would do so if it weren't for the distraction of the city's contemporary animation.

Hanseatic History

A center of the Flemish textile trade, medieval Bruges hosted the most important of the four principal foreign stations, or *Kontore,* of the Hanseatic League (the other three were in London, Bergen, and Novgorod). The Hansa, as it was known, was a powerful, Baltic-based association of north-European trading towns that has been described, not entirely fancifully, as an early version of the European Union.

Bruges has a rich heritage of civic buildings from the Hanseatic period—guild halls, exchanges, warehouses, and wealthy merchant residences. In the district around the *Oosterlingenhuis,* traders from Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen, and other Hansa towns lived and worked. The league's most important assets were its *Hansekoggen,* square-sailed, broad-beamed wooden merchant ships that could carry 200 tons of cargo.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Bruges is the consistently warm welcome its residents provide to the swarms of visitors. The basis for this is more than mere economics—those who live in Bruges love their city and can well appreciate that others want to experience it.

1 Orientation

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport is the main airport for Bruges (see "Getting There" in chapter 2). There is a small airport at Ostend (Oostende) just 24km (15 miles) from Bruges at the Belgian coast, but it handles mostly charter and air-taxi flights.

BY TRAIN

Trains arrive every hour or so from Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent, and from the North Sea resort of Ostend (Oostende) and the ferry port of Zeebrugge. Journey time is about 1 hour from Brussels and Antwerp, 30 minutes from Ghent, and 15 minutes from Ostend and Zeebrugge. A train to and from Lille in northern France connects there with the Eurostar trains through the Channel Tunnel from London to Paris and Brussels. From Paris, you can take the Thalys high-speed trains through Brussels direct to Bruges, or the slower and cheaper International trains, changing in Brussels. From Amsterdam, you can go via Antwerp or Brussels, either on the Thalys or the normal International and Inter-City trains.

Although the city is called Bruges in both English and French, look out for its Flemish name, BRUGGE, written on the rail-station name boards. The station is on Stationsplein, about 1.6km (1 mile) south of town, a 20-minute walk to the town center, or a short bus—choose any bus labeled CENTRUM and get out at the Markt—or taxi ride. You can even get started on sightseeing here, because inside the station is a large wall mural depicting scenes from Bruges's history and everyday life. And when leaving, the elegant Perron Brasserie is a good place for a pretrain snack or drink. For train information, call ✆ **050/38-23-82** between 6:30am and 10:30pm.

BY BUS

Buses are less useful than trains for getting to Bruges. The Bruges bus station adjoins the rail station (see above). For schedule and fare information, call ✆ **070/22-02-00** daily between 6am and 9pm. **Eurolines** operates a daily service from London's Victoria Coach Station—via the Dover-Calais (France) ferry or the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle train—to Brussels, stopping at Bruges. Bruges can also be reached from all over Britain and Europe on the Eurolines network, via London or Brussels. For schedule and fare information, contact Eurolines at ✆ **08705/808080** in Britain, and ✆ **02/274-13-50** in Belgium.

Impressions

The difference between Bruges and other cities is that in the latter, you look about for the picturesque, and don't find it easily, while in Bruges, assailed on every side by the picturesque, you look curiously for the unpicturesque, and don't find it easily.

—Arnold Bennett, 1896

BY CAR

Bruges is 92km (57 miles) northwest of Brussels and 51km (32 miles) northwest of Ghent on A10/E40; 102km (63 miles) west of Antwerp on A14/E17 and A10/E40, and 30km (19 miles) southeast of Ostend on A10/E40; and 16km (10 miles) south of the ferry port Zeebrugge on N31 and N371. From Calais and the Channel Tunnel, take E40 east. For a hassle-free visit to Bruges, drive directly to the large underground car park near the rail station at 't Zand and leave your car there until you're headed out of town. You'll find it's all but impossible to use a car in the center, since the confusing network of one-way streets makes driving a trial.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The tourist office, **Toerisme Brugge,** Burg 11, 8000 Brugge (✆ **050/44-86-86;** fax 050/44-86-00; www.brugge.be), is right in the center of town, in the historic Palace of the Liberty of Bruges. It's open March to mid-November, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 6:30pm, weekends from 10am to noon and 2 to 6:30pm; mid-November to February, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5pm, weekends from 9:30am to 1pm and 2 to 5:30pm. This friendly, efficient office has brochures that outline walking, coach, canal, and horse-drawn-carriage tours, as well as detailed information on many sightseeing attractions. Ask for the complimentary annual ***events@brugge*** brochure and monthly ***Exit*** newsletter, both of them excellent directories of current goings-on.

In addition, there's a booth for tourist information and hotel bookings outside the rail station.

CITY LAYOUT

Bruges has two hearts, the side-by-side monumental squares called the Markt and the Burg. Narrow streets fan out from these two squares, while a network of canals threads its way to every section of the small city. The center is almost encircled by a canal that opens at its southern end to become the Minnewater (Lake of Love), which is filled with swans and other birds and bordered by the Begijnhof and a fine park. On the outer side of the Minnewater is the rail station.

2 Getting Around

The center of Bruges is compact and filled with pedestrian-only streets, which makes walking the best way to get around. Wear good walking shoes, though, because those charming cobblestones can be hard going. And watch out for bikes.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Bruges has no subway or trams. Most city buses depart from the bus station beside the rail station, or from a secondary station at 't Zand, and many buses stop in the center at the Markt. Schedules are prominently posted. A day pass giving unlimited travel on all city buses is 2.90€ ($3.70) and can be bought on the bus, or at the booths at the bus stations; you only have to take three buses to do better than if you purchase single-journey tickets at 1€ ($1.25) each. For information on the city and regional bus service operated by the **De Lijn** company, call ✆ **070/22-02-00.**

BY BICYCLE

You can rent a pedal bike from the rail station (✆ **050/30-23-29**) for 9€ ($11) per day, plus a 13€ ($16) deposit; you get a discount on rentals of 3 days or

more. In addition, many hotels rent bicycles to guests, and there are also at least a dozen bike-rental stores around town. Biking is a terrific way to get around Bruges or to get out of town to the nearby village of Damme (see later in this chapter) by way of beautiful canalside roads. Recent traffic-control measures have made pedal-bikers privileged road users—in more than 50 of the narrow, one-way streets in the city center, bikers can travel in both directions. But some streets are one-way only and you can be fined if you're caught riding against the traffic flow. In addition, you should always be careful because the streets are filled with pedestrians, many of whom have no experience of bicycles en masse, and are liable to step in front of you without looking.

BY CAR

Don't drive: Leave your car at your hotel parking lot (if it has one), at one of six big, prominently labeled underground parking garages in the city center (these get expensive for long stays), at one of four cheap park-and-ride lots beside the rail station, or at a free parking zone outside the city center. It's a short walk into the heart of the old city from any of the parking lots. Driving the narrow streets, many of them one-way, can be confusing. The parking rules are firmly enforced, and unlawfully parked cars will be ticketed, wheel-clamped, or towed.

BY TAXI

There are taxi stands at the Markt (✆ **050/33-44-44**) and outside the rail station on Stationsplein (✆ **050/38-46-60**).

FAST FACTS: Bruges

American Express There is no office in Bruges. The nearest is in Brussels (see "Fast Facts: Brussels" in chapter 3).

Area Code The telephone area code for Bruges is **050.** You need to dial the **050** area code both from inside Bruges and from elsewhere in Belgium. Dial **50** (without the initial 0) if you are phoning Bruges from outside Belgium.

Business Hours **Banks** are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30 or 5pm. Open hours for **offices** are Monday to Friday from 9 or 10am to 4 or 5pm. Most **stores** are open Monday to Saturday from 9 or 10am to 6 or 7pm; some stay open on Friday to 8 or 9pm.

Car Rental Driving is not a good way to see the city's attractions, but if you must rent a car, you'll find **Avis** at Koningin Astridlaan 97/7 (✆ **050/39-44-51**), and **Hertz** at Baron Ruzettelaan 6 (✆ **050/37-72-34**).

Currency Exchange The tourist office (see "Visitor Information" above) is a good place to change money and traveler's checks, as are banks. ATMs, identified by MISTER CASH and BANCONTACT signs, in the Markt and at numerous other points in the city center can be accessed by credit cards, bank cards, and charge cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks.

Doctors For a doctor on weekend duty (Fri 8pm to Mon 8am), call ✆ **050/36-40-10.**

Emergencies For the police, dial ✆ **101;** for firefighters and ambulance, ✆ **100.**

Hospital For medical assistance, go to the **Academisch Ziekenhuis Sint-Jan,** Riddershove 10 (✆ **050/45-21-11**).

Information See "Visitor Information" above.

Internet Access A centrally located choice is **The Coffee Link,** Mariastraat 38 (✆ **050/349973;** www.thecoffeelink.com), in the medieval Oud Sint-Jan Hospital complex.

Language The local language in Bruges is Dutch (Flemish). Many residents of Bruges are fluent in English, and almost all speak at least some. Stores, restaurants, and hotels usually have at least one or two employees who are fluent in English. Although many residents can also speak French (the city gets many French-speaking visitors from elsewhere in Belgium and from across the nearby border in France), being proud Flemings they generally prefer that English-speaking visitors speak to them in English, instead of trying out their French on them, be it ever so fluent.

Newspapers & Magazines The ***Bulletin,*** Belgium's Brussels-based weekly magazine in English, also covers Bruges, though not in as much depth as it does the capital. See also "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Pharmacies A pharmacy is called an *apotheek* in Dutch. Regular pharmacy hours are Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm (some close earlier on Sat). Try the centrally located **Soetaart Apotheek,** Vlamingstraat 17 (✆ **050/33-25-95**), just north of the Markt. All pharmacies have details of nearby all-night and Sunday pharmacies posted on the door.

Police (Politie) In an emergency, call ✆ **101.** In nonurgent situations, go to the **Central Police Station,** Hauwerstraat 7 (✆ **050/44-88-44**). Unlike in Brussels, the Bruges police are likely to be both professional and helpful to visitors with problems.

Post Office The main post office, Markt 5 (✆ **050/33-14-11**), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Restrooms See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2. Should you have a toilet emergency in the center of Bruges (sorry, I can't help you if you stray from the center), the very best address to find relief is at the Crown Plaza Brugge Hotel in the square called the Burg. There are also decent public restrooms on the west side of the small lake called the Minnewater, close to the Begijnhof.

Safety Crime is not much of a problem in Bruges. The city is safe and there are no areas you need to fear going into. That said, since it's a big tourist center, it can't hurt to take routine precautions against pickpocketing and other types of theft.

Telephones See "Area Code" above and "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Tipping See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, and Métro service, call ✆ **070/22-02-00.**

3 Where to Stay

If a high-rise luxury hotel is your cup of tea, then my best advice is that you stay in Brussels and commute to Bruges. But if you like the idea of a small, atmospheric hostelry, perhaps right on the banks of a picturesque canal, with modern

Bruges Accommodations & Dining

ACCOMMODATIONS
Dante **20**
De Markies **21**
De Snippe **26**
Die Swaene **8**
Duc de Bourgogne **13**
Egmond **29**
Erasmus **12**
Fevery **2**
Heritage **5**
Lucca **4**
Montanus **25**
Oud Huis Amsterdam **3**
Romantik Pandhotel **18**
`t Bourgoensche Cruyce **14**
Ter Duinen **1**
`t Keizershof **27**

DINING
Bhavani **23**
Brasserie Erasmus **12**
Breydel-de-Coninck **16**
De Gouden Meermin **6**
De Karmeliet **9**
De Snippe **26**
De Stove **10**
Duc de Bourgogne **13**
De Visscherie **15**
Graaf van Vlaanderen **22**
Kasteel Minnewater **28**
Lotus **7**
`t Bourgoensche Cruyce **14**
`t Huidevettershuis **17**
`t Koffieboontje **11**
`t Pandreitje **19**
`t Putje **24**

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P Parking

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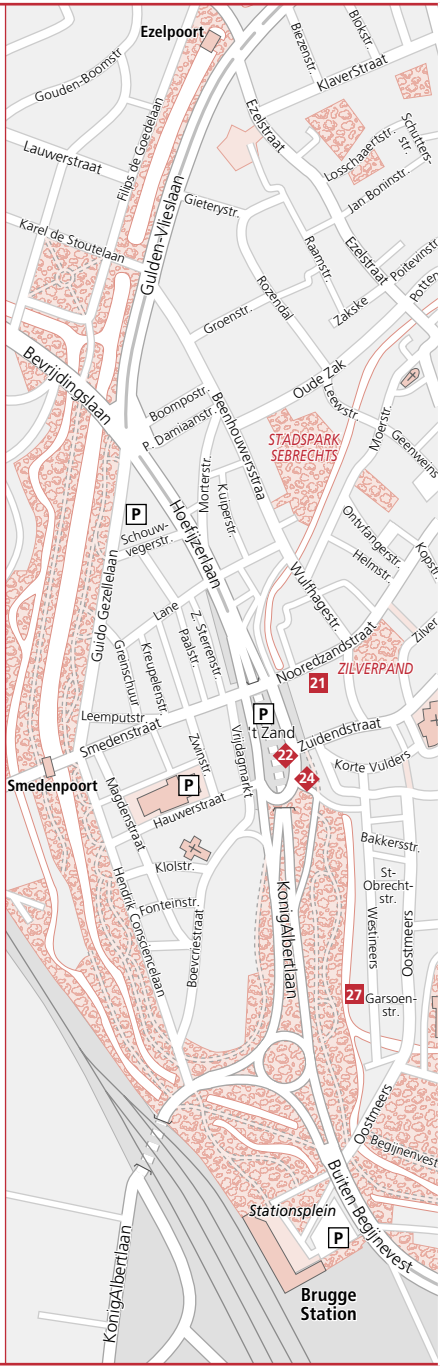

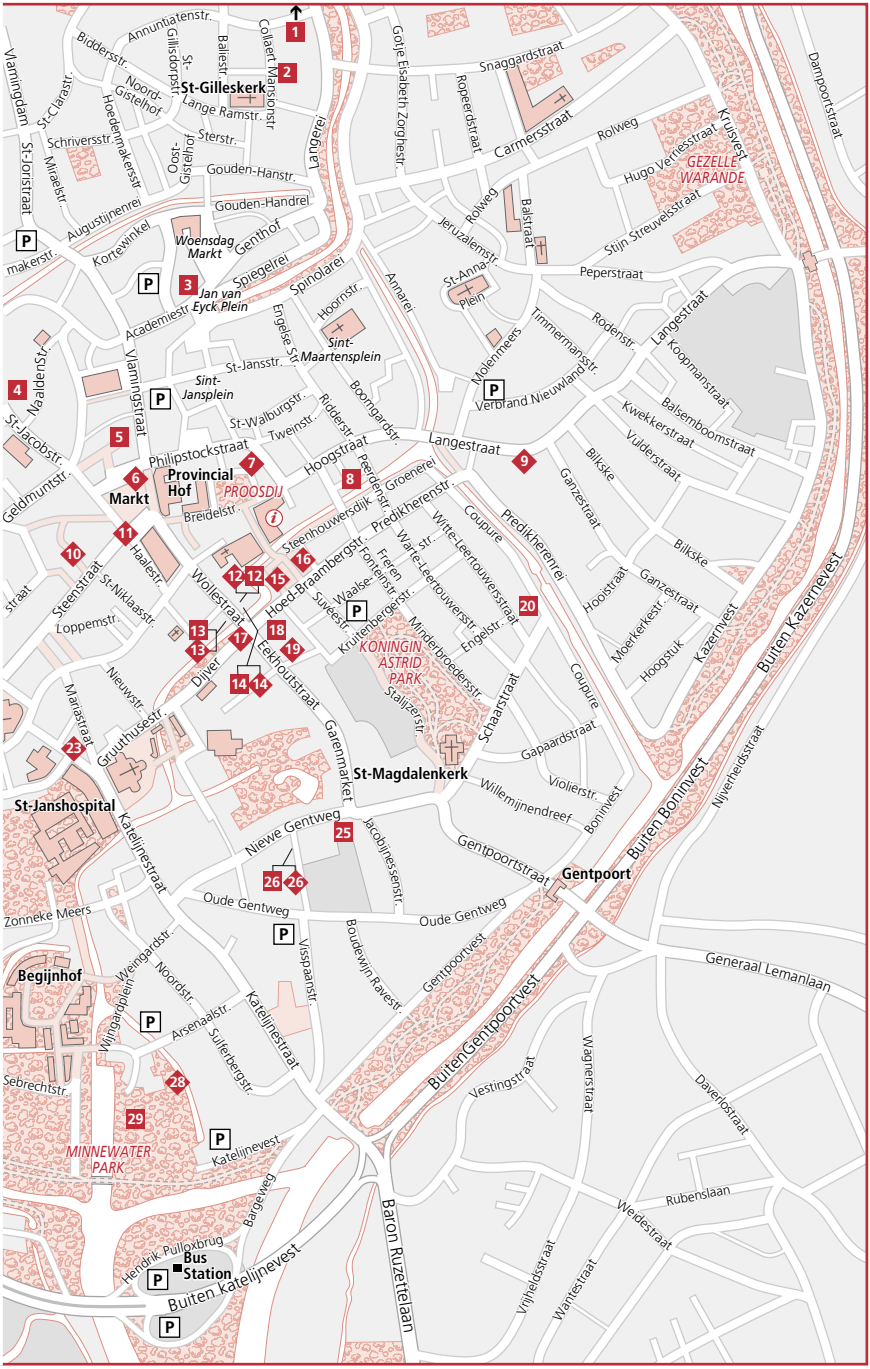
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Sint-Maartensplein
Sint-Jansplein
Woensdag Markt
KONINGIN ASTRID PARK
MINNEWATER PARK
St-Magdalenkerk
St-Janshospitaal
Begijnhof
Gentpoort
Bus Station
GEZELLE WARANDE
Annunciatenstr.
Biddersstr.
Gilliskorpstr.
Baliestr.
Collaert Mansionstr.
Snaggaardstraat
Dampoortstraat
Vlamingdam
St-Clarastr.
Noord-Gistelhof
Lange Ramstr.
Roperstraat
Carmerssstraat
Rolweg
Kruisvest
Hugo Verriesstraat
Schriversstr.
Hoedenmakersstr.
Oost-Gistelhof
Sterstr.
Gouden-Handstr.
Gouden-Handrel
Stijn Streuvelsstraat
Augustijnenrei
Kortewinkel
Genthof
Jeruzalemstr.
Balstraat
Peperstraat
Spiegelrei
Spinolarei
Annarei
St-Anna Plein
Academiestr.
Engelse St.
Hoornstr.
Timmermanstr.
Rodenstr.
Langestraat
Koopmanstraat
Balsemboomstraat
Kwekkerstraat
Vijldestraat
Bilkske
Ganzestraat
Hoostraat
Moerkerkestr.
Hoogstuk
Kazernvest
Buiten Kazernvest
Nijverheidsstraat
Buiten Bonifvest
Bonifvest
Violierstr.
Willemijnendreef
Gapaardstraat
Coupure
Schaarstraat
Predikherenrei
Predikherenstr.
Witte-Leertouwerstraat
Meerderbroedersstr.
Engelstr.
Kruitenburgerstr.
Suvestr.
Waalse Kaai
Freren
Groenerei
Pierlerstr.
Boomgardstr.
Ridderstr.
Twijnstr.
St-Walburgstr.
St-Jansstr.
Verbrand Nieuwland
Molenmeers
Naaldenstr.
St-Jacobstr.
Geldmuntstr.
Philipstockstraat
Breidelstr.
Steenhouwersdijk
Haaistr.
Steenstr.
St-Niklaasstr.
Loppemstr.
Wollestraat
Hoed-Braambergstr.
Eekhoutstraat
Dijver
Nieuwstr.
Mariastraat
Gruuthusestr.
Garenmarket
Katelijnestraat
Zonneke Meers
Niewe Gentweg
Jacobijnessenstr.
Gentpoortstraat
Oude Gentweg
Visspaarstr.
Boudewijn Ravestr.
Gentpoortvest
Generaal Lemanlaan
Buiten Gentpoortvest
Vestingstraat
Wagnerstraat
Daverlostraat
Rubenslaan
Weidestraat
Vrijheidstraat
Wantestraat
Baron Ruzettelaan
Buiten Katelijnevest
Bargeweg
Hendrik Pulloxbrug
Sebrechtstr.
Sulferbergstr.
Arsenaalstr.
Noordstr.
Wingaardplein
Weingardstr.

(if not necessarily luxurious) facilities, then opt to stay at one of the hotels reviewed below. You'll find that the accommodations here enhance your visit by enabling you to sink into the timelessness of Bruges.

Try not to arrive without a reservation, particularly in summer. With a mind-boggling four million visitors a year, Bruges is Belgium's premier tourist destination, and even though many are day-trippers, it's still just about essential to make reservations at least 2 weeks before you plan to come. If you do come into town with no place to stay, head immediately to the tourist office—like tourist offices throughout Belgium, Bruges has a very good reservation service and also can book ahead for you. Accommodations are less heavily booked during the week than on weekends.

Choosing an area is fairly straightforward in Bruges: Virtually all of the city's hotels are inside the ring canal that delineates the Old Town. If you want to stay within 5 to 10 minutes walking time from the Markt or the Burg, you'll have virtually Bruges's entire hotel stock to choose from. A bit further out from here—say, 15 to 20 minutes walking time from these two central squares—there are still plenty of options, and you're more likely to find a hotel in a tranquil spot, and on or near a canal.

Note that where hotels have no private parking, there's another option beyond the "Limited street parking" that might be listed in the service information. Bruges's small city center holds six big public parking garages, all clearly marked on access roads. So there will always be at least one within a short walk of your hotel.

EXPENSIVE

De Snippe ★★ Set in an early-18th-century building in the center of town, De Snippe offers luxurious and spacious rooms, all furnished with restrained elegance and some with fireplaces. Two rooms have Jacuzzis. All bathrooms have been fully renovated. The hotel has one of Bruges's leading restaurants (see "Where to Dine" below).

Nieuwe Gentweg 53, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-70-70.** Fax 050/33-76-62. www.desnippe.be. 9 units. 145–195€ ($181–$244) double; 310€ ($388) suite. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1 or 11. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; concierge; limited room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Die Swaene ★★★ This small hotel on the beautiful city-center Groenerei canal has rightly been called one of the most romantic in Europe, thanks in great part to the care lavished on it by the Hessels family. It looks out across the canal to the rear of the Landhuis van het Brugse Vrije palace on the Burg. The comfortable rooms are elegantly and individually furnished, and the lounge, from 1779, was formerly the Guild Hall of the Tailors. You might also lodge in an annex. The in-house restaurant, where the specialties are seafood and regional cuisine, has won favorable reviews from guests and critics alike.

Steenhouwersdijk 1, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-27-98.** Fax 050/33-66-74. www.dieswaene-hotel.com. 32 units. 185€–225€ ($231–$281) double; 320€–420€ ($400–$525) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, V. Parking 10€ ($13). Bus: 1 or 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (seafood/Flemish); lounge; bar; heated indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; concierge; secretarial services; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* A/C (some rooms), TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Romantik Pandhotel ★★ Close to the Markt, this lovely 18th-century mansion surrounded by plane trees is an oasis of tranquillity. Although it provides modern conveniences, its exquisite, old-fashioned furnishings lend special grace to comfortable rooms. Guests praise Mrs. Chris Vanhaecke-Dewaele for

her hospitality and attention to detail. Guests can use an Internet-connected computer in the lobby to send and receive e-mail.

Pandreitje 16, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-06-66.** Fax 050/34-05-56. www.pandhotel.com. 24 units. 150€–320€ ($188–$400) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 1 or 6. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Dante This ultramodern brick hotel is set alongside a lovely canal, a short walk west from the center of Bruges—it takes its name from a reference to Bruges in the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy.* The hotel is an artful combination of old Bruges style and modern amenities and fittings. Its spacious guest rooms are restfully decorated in warm colors like peach and furnished with bamboo and rattan beds. Most have a view of the canal at Coupure. The Dante's vegetarian restaurant **Toermalijn** is highly regarded locally.

Coupure 29, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-01-94.** Fax 050/34-35-39. www.hoteldante.com. 22 units. 106€–131€ ($133–$164). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (vegetarian); game room; limited room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

De Markies For anyone who wants to experience Bruges's old-world charm without surrendering modern comforts or their wallet, this is a good bet. Its position on a corner of the big square called 't Zand is convenient for exploring the old center. The spacious rooms have modern furnishings.

't Zand 5, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-83-34.** Fax 050/34-87-87. 18 units. 77€–87€ ($96–$109) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; limited room service. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Duc de Bourgogne ★ This elegant, small hotel in a 17th-century canalside building has quite large, luxuriously furnished rooms, with antiques scattered throughout. A ground-floor restaurant overlooks the canal, which is illuminated at night.

Huidenvettersplein 12, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-20-38.** Fax 050/34-40-37. www.ducdebourgogne.be. 10 units. 110€–150€ ($138–$188) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); lounge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

Egmond ★★ The Egmond has just eight rooms, in a rambling mansion next to the Minnewater Park, but the lucky few who stay here will find ample space, plenty of family ambience, abundant local color, and lots of peace and tranquillity. All rooms have recently been redecorated and are furnished in an individual style with views of the garden and the Minnewater Park. Every afternoon, free coffee and tea are served in the new garden terrace or in the lounge, which has an 18th-century fireplace, and there's an "honesty bar," where you help yourself to a drink and leave the payment.

Minnewater 15, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-14-45.** Fax 050/34-29-40. www.egmond.be. 8 units. 100€–120€ ($125–$150) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. Bus: 1 or 11. *In room:* A/C (in some rooms), TV, dataport, hair dryer, safe.

Erasmus ★ This small, cozy hotel is set in a picturesque little square alongside a canal in the town center. The rooms were recently fully renovated, with new carpets and new bathroom fixtures and fittings. All rooms have attractive, modern furnishings, and some have air-conditioning.

Wollestraat 35 (near the Belfry), 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-57-81.** Fax 050/33-47-27. www.hotelerasmus.com. 10 units. 80€–175€ ($100–$219) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. No parking. Bus: 1 or 6. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; limited room service; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some rooms), TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Heritage ★ A short walk from the Markt in a mansion dating from 1869, the recently renamed Heritage (formerly the Hansa) has a well-established reputation in Bruges. Its rooms are modern and not overly big but warmly furnished and decorated, and fitted out with DVD players. The beds are comfortable, the staff friendly, and the ambience of the hotel welcoming. The ornamental ceiling in the breakfast room is a reminder of the building's respectable origins.

Niklaas Desparsstraat 11, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/44-44-44.** Fax 050/44-44-40. www.hotel-heritage.com. 24 units. 135€–218€ ($169–$273) double; 310€–370€ ($388–$463) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking 15€ ($19). **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; health club; bike rental; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Montanus ★ The former budget Hotel St. Christophe now has new ownership, a new name, and a whole new, more upmarket ethos. This three-story hotel offers a range of price options for comfortable accommodations. Some of the individually styled guest rooms overlook a big and lovely garden.

Nieuwe Gentweg 78, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-11-76.** Fax 050/34-09-38. www.montanus.be. 24 units. 108€–220€ ($135–$275) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ ($19). Bus: 1 or 11. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Oud-Huis Amsterdam ★★ Philip and Caroline Traen have made a fine hotel out of this large canalside building, parts of which date back to the 1300s. Rooms are large and sumptuously furnished. The colors and decorative accents hearken back to the building's origins, based on meticulous research and restoration. Some of the bathrooms feature whirlpool tubs. The elegant guest rooms in the front overlook the canal; those in back overlook the garden and picturesque rooftops. The entrance hall, the small salon off the reception area, and the popular bar called The Meeting all have a pleasant atmosphere. In the rear there's a charming little courtyard with umbrella tables and a garden off to one side—the setting for Sunday concerts in June. The famed Traen hospitality makes a stay here in the town center very special. Around half of the guest rooms have air-conditioning.

Spiegelrei 3, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-18-10.** Fax 050/33-88-91. www.oha.be. 34 units. 140€–238€ ($175–$298) double; 388€ ($485) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ ($16). Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Bar; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some rooms), TV, dataport, hair dryer.

't Bourgoensche Cruyce ★★ This tiny, family-run hotel, which opens onto a lovely little inner courtyard, provides the very epitome of a Bruges experience. Rooms are adequately large and furnished in a modern style. The hotel's best feature is the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. de Flandre, the proprietors.

Wollestraat 41–43 (1 block from the Belfry), 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-79-26.** Fax 050/34-19-68. 8 units. 118€–128€ ($148–$160) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Continental); bar. *In room:* TV.

Ter Duinen ★ This charming hotel is an ideal marriage of classical style and modern conveniences. Guest rooms are ample in size, brightly decorated, and have modern furnishings. Some rooms have wooden ceiling beams, and some have a great view overlooking the tranquil Langerei canal, just north of the town center and within easy walking distance. Proprietors Marc and Lieve Bossu-Van

Tips Give It a Miss

If you don't care much for crowds, avoid the tourist crush by staying away from Bruges in summertime, when the place is something of a madhouse. You could visit Ghent or Antwerp instead. Go to Bruges in spring or fall instead, or even in winter. (But you'll miss out on a lot of animation too.)

Den Heuvel take a justified pride in their hotel and extend a friendly welcome to guests.

Langerei 52, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-04-37.** Fax 050/34-42-16. www.terduinenhotel.be. 20 units. 98€–149€ ($123–$186) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Lounge; limited room service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Fevery Don't be put off by the name: It's the Fevery (*Fay*-ver-ee), not Fevery as in feverish. This recently renovated family hotel is on a quiet side street in a quiet part of town, facing the Sint-Gilliskerk (St. Giles's Church), just north of the center, a short and pleasant walk away. The modern and comfortably furnished guest rooms are cheery and immaculate, with new bathrooms and monogrammed pressed sheets. One room is a quad. There's a downstairs lounge and breakfast room. The proprietor, Mr. Asselman, is a wealth of local information and clearly takes great pride in his establishment.

Collaert Mansionstraat 3 (off Langerei), 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-12-69.** Fax 050/33-17-91. www.hotelfevery.be. 12 units. 60€–80€ ($75–$100) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 4 or 8. **Amenities:** Lounge; bike rental. *In room:* TV.

Lucca *Value* Built in the 14th century by a wealthy merchant from Lucca, Italy, the high ceilings and wide halls of this mansion right in the heart of romantic Bruges convey a sense of luxury. The welcome is warm, and the guest rooms are in fine condition and sport pine furnishings. Rooms with bathrooms also have TVs. Breakfast is served in a cozy medieval cellar decorated with antiques.

Naaldenstraat 30, 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/34-20-67.** Fax 050/33-34-64. www.hotellucca.be. 18 units, 14 with bathroom. 50€ ($63) double without bathroom; 85€ ($106) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. *In room:* TV (in some rooms).

't Keizershof Despite being one of the least expensive hotels in Bruges, 't Keizershof gets high marks for having clean, comfortable accommodations in a quiet, peaceful location. The young couple who own and operate this hotel speak several languages and are very helpful to guests in planning their stays in Bruges. I like the subtle encouragements they give to potential guests, including one slogan that goes: "When you are sleeping, we look just like one of those big fancy hotels."

Oostmeers 126 (near the rail station), 8000 Brugge. ✆ **050/33-87-28.** http://users.belgacom.net/hotel.keizershof. 7 units, none with bathroom. 38€ ($48) double. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; laundry service. *In room:* No phone.

4 Where to Dine

Bruges certainly has no shortage of restaurants. You'll be practically tripping over them in the city center. Most are decent—it's hard to find Belgian restaurants that are consistently bad—even if some have perhaps gotten too used to the "here today, gone tomorrow" nature of the tourists that are their main market.

If all you want is to be fed and watered reasonably and put back on the sightseeing trail as fast as possible, you'll have no problem. The restaurants featured below, however, aim to do better: to make dining part of your memorable Bruges experience.

VERY EXPENSIVE

De Karmeliet ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH In 1996 chef Geert Van Hecke became the first Flemish chef to be awarded three Michelin stars. He has described his award-winning menu as "international cuisine made with local products" that aims to combine French quality with Flemish quantity. The result is outstanding, and the decor is as elegant as the fine cuisine deserves. Van Hecke will happily whip up something special from a pig's trotter, and can do things with the humble potato that would turn heads in Idaho—his deceptively plain-sounding potato bouillon with shelled shrimps and cod is a longtime favorite, and the somewhat disturbing-sounding *ratte* combines potatoes with cauliflower and caviar. You'll find the local Oud Brugge cheese both as an ingredient and on the cheese board, and some sauces are made using Belgian *jenever* (gin) and Belgian beers.

Langestraat 19. ✆ **050/33-82-59.** Reservations required. Main courses 20€–35€ ($25–$44); fixed-price menus 68€–83€ ($85–$104). AE, DC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm and 7–9:30pm; Sun 7–9:30pm except June–Sept.

't Pandreitje ★★ FRENCH/BELGIAN This restaurant is one of the nicest spots in town. It's in the shade of the medieval Market Hall's bell tower, just off of the Rozenhoedkaai, one of the most beautiful canalsides in Bruges. The interior of this Renaissance-era private home has been turned into an elegant Louis XVI setting for a menu of classic dishes. The four-course a la carte meal is superb, and the menu of preselected choices is excellent. Try the sea bass served with fennel, parsley sauce, and sautéed potatoes; or the salad of Dublin Bay prawns with artichoke and a truffle vinaigrette.

Pandreitje 6. ✆ **050/33-11-90.** www.pandreitje.be. Fixed-price menus 55€–70€ ($69–$88). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat noon–2pm and 7–9:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

't Bourgoensche Cruyce FLEMISH/FRENCH You'd be hard put to find a better location, finer food, or a friendlier welcome. The rustic charm of this small dining room overlooking a canal in the town center enhances the culinary delights. The regional specialties prepared by the experienced chef are just simply perfect. The menu reflects the very best in-season ingredients. Among the menu dishes not to be missed is the *gepocheerde zeetongreepjes met Zeebrugse garnalen, gestoofde chinese kool, purée van aardappelen en luchtige saus van jonge prei* (poached filet of sole with Zeebrugge prawns, steamed Chinese cabbage, puréed potato, and a tender-leek sauce) or any of the other superb seafood dishes. Order the five-course "gastronomic sampling menu" if you just can't make a decision.

Wollestraat 41–43. ✆ **050/33-79-26.** Main courses 28€ ($35); fixed-price menus 49€–60€ ($61–$75). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon noon–2:30pm and 7–9:30pm.

De Snippe ★★ NOUVELLE FRENCH De Snippe enjoys a well-earned reputation as one of Bruges's finest restaurants. Its seafood dishes are particularly good. If you like crustaceans, try the delicious *pot au feu* (stew) of lobster with basil and a sesame crust.

In De Snippe Hotel, Nieuwe Gentweg 53. ✆ **050/33-70-70.** www.desnippe.be. Main courses 16€–35€ ($20–$44); fixed-price menus 71€ ($89). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10pm; Tues–Sat noon–2:30pm.

De Visscherie ★★ SEAFOOD This attractive restaurant faces the old Fish Market in the town center, and as you might expect, "fruits of the sea" take top billing on the menu. Freshness is guaranteed. Specialties include shellfish in many guises (try the spotted scallops with roe) and Channel sole.

Vismarkt 8. ✆ **050/33-02-12.** www.visscherie.be. Main courses 32€–53€ ($40–$66). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2pm and 7–10pm.

Duc de Bourgogne ★ FRENCH This large, elegant dining room overlooks a canal, which is illuminated at night. The decor here is just this side of formal, although in summer no rigid dress code is enforced. The classic menu is a lengthy one. The lunch menu changes daily, and the dinner changes every 2 weeks. Specialties include noisettes of veal.

Huidenvettersplein 12 (near the Burg). ✆ **050/33-20-38.** www.ducdebourgogne.be. Reservations required. Main courses 16€–24€ ($20–$32); menus 35€–56€ ($44–$70). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun noon–2pm; Tues–Sun 7–9pm.

't Huidevettershuis ★★ FLEMISH/SEAFOOD This charmer, right on a canal in the town center, is in a stone house with flowers blooming in diamond-paned windows. There's a cozy, intimate room downstairs and a pleasant, larger one upstairs. Look for Flemish specialties such as the souplike *waterzooï* (with chicken), in addition to ham, rabbit, and herring dishes. A notable, and for Flanders, surprising, absentee from the menu is mussels; but the same people also own the De Visscherie seafood restaurant (see above) and a specialist mussels restaurant, De Mosselkelder, also in Huidenvettersplein, so maybe that explains it.

Huidenvettersplein 10–11. ✆ **050/33-95-06.** www.huidevettershuis.be. Main courses 22€–58€ ($28–$73). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon noon–2pm and 6–10pm.

MODERATE

Bhavani ★ INDIAN For a change from traditional Belgian food, try the better of Bruges's pair of traditional Indian restaurants. It's a consistently fine performer across a wide range of Subcontinental cuisine—thali, tandoori, curry, vegetarian, and seafood—without being exactly outstanding in any category. You shouldn't have to count your rupees too closely, and the set meals are a good value. Service is friendly and prompt, and takeout service is available if you'd rather eat back at your hotel. The chicken tikka Maharaja is a good bet, as is the vegetarian *thali.* A mix of coziness, colonial atmosphere, Indian music, and exotic charm marks a setting that gives traditional Indian motifs a modern slant. There's a children's menu for kids who don't like spicy Indian food.

Simon Stevinplein 5 (off of Oude Burg). ✆ **050/33-90-25.** www.bhavani.be. Main courses 16€–25€ ($20–$31); fixed-price menus 19€–26€ ($24–$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 4:30pm–12:30am.

Breydel-de-Coninck ★ SEAFOOD An aquarium of tropical fish at the entrance sets a marine mood in this seafood restaurant just off the Markt. Woodbeam ceilings and plaid upholstery are cheerful but the real attraction is the seafood. The specialties here are mussels, eels, and lobsters prepared with white wine, cream, or garlic sauces that enhance the flavor of the seafood without overwhelming it. Try a pail full of plain mussels, or go for something with a little more zest, like the *moules Provençal* (mussels in a light red sauce with mushrooms, peppers, and onions). And the homemade ice cream with caramel sauce is a good way to wind up.

Breidelstraat 24. ✆ **050/33-27-46.** Main courses 9.90€–21€ ($12–$26); fixed-price meals 16€–36€ ($20–$45). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–3pm and 6–9:30pm.

De Gouden Meermin ★ FLEMISH This is my favorite of the many brasseries and cafes that line the Markt. The medieval square is such a romantic setting for a meal that few visitors can resist it, and although it's some excuse that most establishments are all but overwhelmed by tourists, they could as a rule do better by their transient clientele. This one does, and has both outdoor dining and a glassed-in room that also overlooks the square. The Flemish dishes are made with fresh local ingredients, and the bowls of homemade soup are delicious. You can't go too far wrong with the "Golden Mermaid's basic *steak-frites* (steak with fries), but they do their name more justice with a fine range of mussel dishes and other seafood offerings like the *sole à l'Ostendaise* (Ostend sole). Sandwiches, snacks, and crepes (a large variety, and all good) also are available. Service is attentive.

In the Central Hotel, Markt 31. ✆ **050/33-37-76.** www.hotelcentral.be. Main courses 12€–32€ ($15–$40); fixed-price menu 32€ ($40). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

De Stove ★★ FLEMISH/SEAFOOD This small, family-owned restaurant combines a rustic atmosphere with a more modern style than is the norm in Bruges. The seafood specialties are well worth a try, particularly the Flemish fish stew with fruits de mer.

Kleine Sint-Amandsstraat 4. ✆ **050/33-78-35.** www.restaurantdestove.be. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 16€–28€ ($20–$35); fixed-price menu 42€–57€ ($53–$71). AE, MC, V. Fri–Tues noon–1:45pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

Kasteel Minnewater ★★ *Value* BELGIAN/FRENCH Old paintings on the walls, a marble fireplace, chandeliers, and fine table linen all complement this château-restaurant's superb location on the Minnewater (Lake of Love). It exudes an unstuffy charm that makes château dining not just something for lords and ladies, and though prices have been edging up, it still provides a good deal considering the setting. Specialties include a suite of unpretentious Flemish seafood dishes such as the *zeetong in boter gebakken en gebakken aardappelen* (sole baked in butter with baked potatoes), and for a starter, the tasty *huisgemaakte garnaalkroketten met salade* (homemade shrimp croquettes with salad), made with the little gray North Sea shrimps. There's an excellent, Marseilles-influenced bouillabaisse, but using North Sea ingredients like cod, sole, shrimps, and shellfish. Carnivores can go for the *varkenhaasje Archiduc en gebakken aardappelen* (pork filet Archiduc with baked potatoes).

Minnewater 4 (near the Begijnhof). ✆ **050/33-42-54.** Main courses 25€–45€ ($31–$56); Markt-menu 30€ ($37). V. Summer daily 11am–11pm (food at lunch and dinner times only); winter Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6:30–11pm, Sat–Sun 11am–11pm (food at lunch and dinner times only).

INEXPENSIVE

Brasserie Erasmus ★ FLEMISH Small but popular, this is a great stop after viewing the cathedral and nearby museums. It serves a large variety of Flemish

Tips All in Good Taste

As the waitperson removes your plate, he or she may ask of what you've just eaten: *Heeft het gesmaakt?* (Did it taste good?). If it did, the appropriate answer is: *Ja, lekker* (Yes, tasty), or *heel lekker* (very tasty). And if the food had been an unparalleled experience of masticatory pleasure, you can roll your eyes, pat your stomach contentedly, and purr: *Mmmm, ja, heerlijk* (wonderful).

dishes, all prepared with beer. If you need help making a selection, you can ask owner Tom for advice, or try these suggestions: The typically Flemish souplike stew dish *waterzooï* is very good here, and it's served with fish, as it's supposed to be, although they also make it with chicken instead, a style that has become the norm elsewhere. If that doesn't grab you, how about *lapin à la bière* (rabbit in a beer sauce)? About 150 different brands of beer are available (for drinking), 10 of them on tap.

Wollestraat 35. ✆ **050/33-57-81.** www.hotelerasmus.com. Main courses 13€–18€ ($16–$22); fixed-price menu 33€ ($41). MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–4pm (summer also Mon) and 6–11pm.

Graaf van Vlaanderen STEAK/SALADS This reasonably priced restaurant near the railroad station has an extensive menu and a decor that relies heavily on mirrors and plants. The fare is equally simple, featuring minute steak (steak so thin it cooks in 1 min.), spaghetti, salads, and *steak-frites* (steak and french fries).

't Zand 19 (in the Graaf van Vlaanderen hotel). ✆ **050/33-31-50.** www.graafvanvlaanderen.be. Main courses 13€–19€ ($16–$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed 7:30am–10pm.

Lotus ★ VEGETARIAN Even nonvegetarians will likely enjoy the delicious lunch here. There are just two menu options—but at least you can choose from a small, medium, or large serving—each with a hearty assortment of imaginatively prepared vegetables, served in a tranquil but cheery Scandinavian-style dining room.

Wapenmakersstraat 5. ✆ **050/33-10-78.** Fixed-price lunch menus 8.50€–11€ ($11–$13). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:45am–2pm.

't Koffieboontje SEAFOOD/FLEMISH The bright, modern interior here strikes a noticeably stylish contrast to the often-dark ambience of many Bruges restaurants. An extensive menu is equally cheery, featuring good, but not fancy, seafood specialties like lobster and salmon, and Belgian staples like mussels, steak, and sole.

Hallestraat 4. ✆ **050/33-80-27.** Main courses 9.75€–17€ ($12–$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm.

't Putje BELGIAN/CONTINENTAL This large brasserie/restaurant close to the Concertgebouw serves main meals centered on expertly grilled meats and seafood enhanced by classic sauces and served with a dollop of potatoes and vegetables. It's reliable but the price of some menu dishes tends toward the expensive. You can enjoy light snacks or a drink on the terrace under red-striped awnings.

In the Hotel 't Putje, 't Zand 31. ✆ **050/33-28-47.** Main courses 9€–30€ ($11–$38); lunch menu 9€ ($11). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–1am.

5 Seeing the Sights

A leading contender for the title of Europe's most romantic town, Bruges is really one big attraction—a fairy-tale mixture of gabled houses, meandering canals, magnificent squares, and narrow cobblestone streets.

THE MARKT

In the Markt (Market Sq.), heraldic banners float from venerable facades. This square, along with the Burg (see below), is the heart of Bruges and the focal point of your sightseeing. Most major points of interest in the city are no more than 5 or 10 minutes' walk away.

Belfort en Hallen (Belfry and Market Halls) ★★ The Belfry was, and still is, the symbol of Bruges's civic pride. Its magnificent 47-bell carillon peals out

Bruges Attractions

Basilica of the Holy Blood **9**
Begijnhof **19**
Belfry and Market Halls **18**
The Burg **11**
Church of Our Lady **15**
Cranenburg **6**
De Vos Almhouse **20**
Diamond Museum **21**
Folklore Museum **4**
Groeninge Museum **17**
Gruuthuse Museum **16**
Hof Bladelin **7**
Holy Savior Cathedral **13**
Hospital of St. John
(Memling Museum) **14**
Jerusalem Church **3**
Lace Center **1**
Palace of the Liberty
of Bruges **10**
Sint-Walburgakerk **2**
Sint-Jacobskerk **5**
Statue of Breydel
and de Coninck **8**
Town Hall **12**

ⓘ Information
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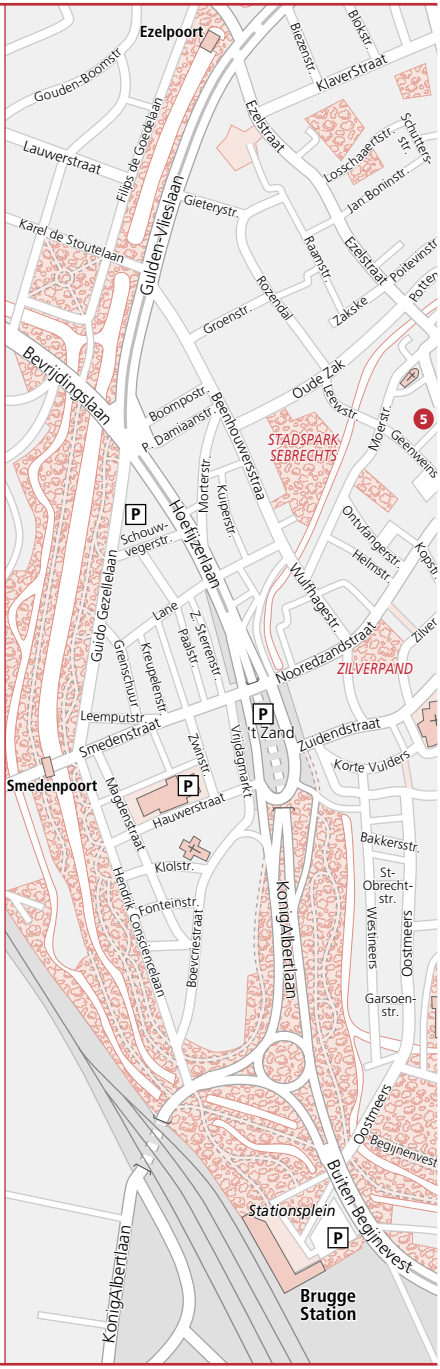
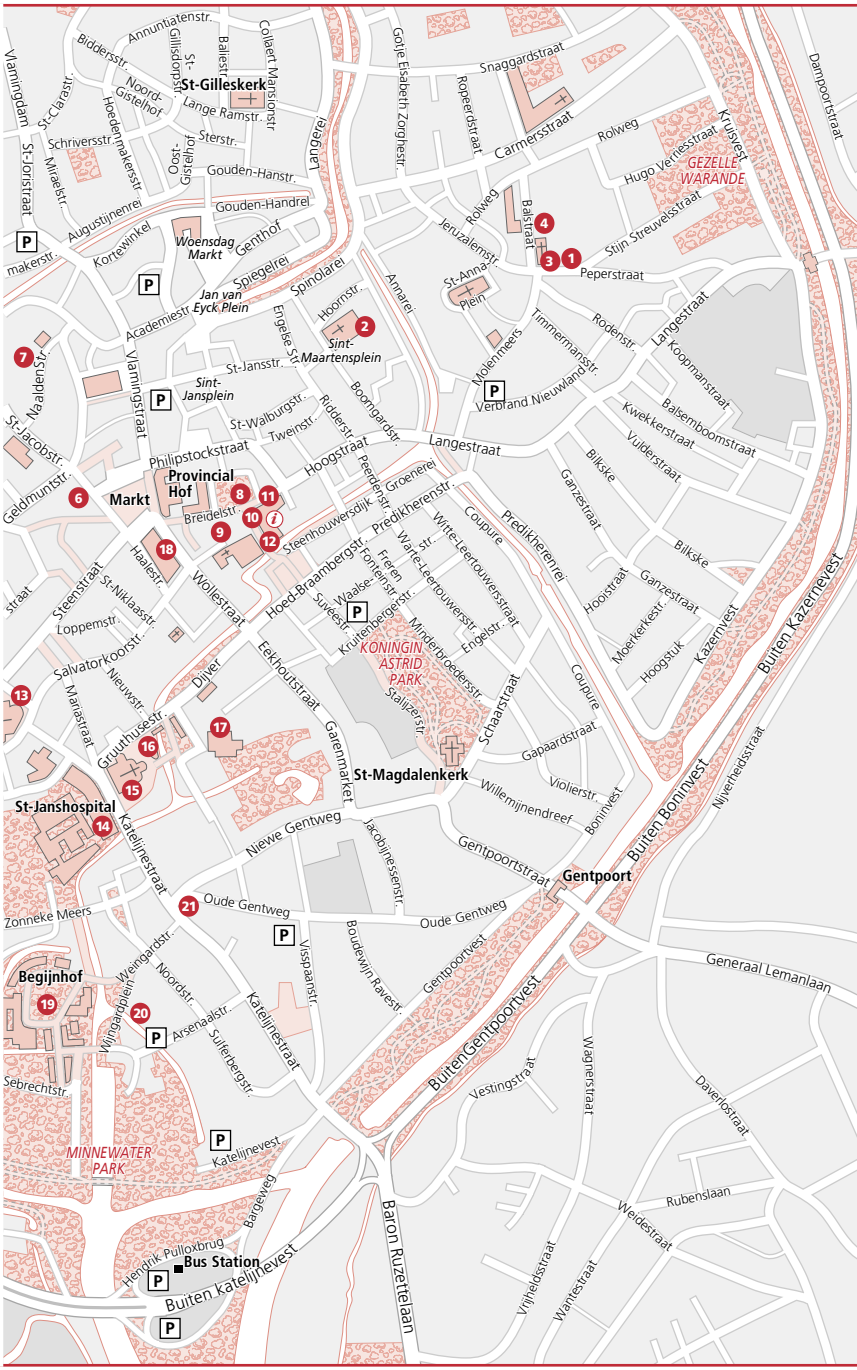



St-Gilleskerk
Woensdag Markt
Jan van Eyck Plein
Sint-Jansplein
Sint-Maartensplein
Provincial Hof
Markt
St-Magdalenkerk
KONINGIN ASTRID PARK
MINNEWATER PARK
St-Janshospital
Begijnhof
Bus Station
Gentpoort
GEZELLE-WARANDE
Verbrand Nieuwland
Snaggaardstraat
Carmerstraat
Rolweg
Peperstraat
Langestraat
Hoogstraat
Steenstraat
Wollestraat
Breidelstr.
Predikherenstr.
Coupure
Gapaardstraat
Violierstr.
Willemijnendreef
Boninvest
Nijverheidsstraat
Generaal Lemanlaan
Gentpoortvest
Oude Gentweg
Niewe Gentweg
Katelijnestraat
Katelijnevest
Buiten Gentpoortvest
Buiten Boninvest
Buiten Kazernevest
Baron Ruzettelaan
Weidestraat
Rubenslaan
Daverlostraat
Wagnerstraat
Vestingstraat
Vrijheidstraat
Waaistraat
Bargeweg
Hendrik Pulloxbrug
Buiten Katelijnevest
Dampoortstraat
Kruisvest
Hugo Verriestraat
Stijn Streuvelsstraat
Baksstraat
Jeruzalemstr.
St-Annaplein
Timmermanstr.
Rodenstr.
Koopmanstraat
Balsemboomstraat
Kwekkerstraat
Vuldestraat
Bilkske
Ganzestraat
Hoostraat
Moerkerkestr.
Hoogstuk
Kazernvest
Predikherenrei
Witte-Leertouwerstraat
Waalse-Leertouwerstraat
Minderbroedersstr.
Engelstr.
Schaarstraat
Jacobijnessenstr.
Boudewijn Ravestr.
Visspaarstr.
Arsenaalstr.
Sulferbergstr.
Wingardstr.
Weingardstr.
Noordstr.
Sebrechtstr.
Oude Gentweg
Zonneke Meers
Gruuthusestr.
Mariastraat
Salvatorkoorstr.
Nieuwstr.
Loppemstr.
Steenstraat
St-Niklaasstr.
Haalestr.
Geldmuntstr.
St-Jacobstr.
Naaldenstr.
Vlamingstraat
Academiestr.
Korte Winkel
Augustijnenrei
Miraestr.
St-Jorisstraat
Vlamingdam
St-Clarastr.
Biddersstr.
Annunciatenstr.
Gillisdorpstr.
Noord-Gistelhof
Oost-Gistelhof
Hoedenmakersstr.
Schriversstr.
Lange Ramstr.
Sterstr.
Baliestr.
Collaert Marisstr.
Gouden-Handrel
Gouden-Hanstr.
Spiegelrei
Spinolarei
Annarei
Hoornstr.
Engelse Str.
Twijnstr.
Ridderstr.
Boomgardstr.
St-Walburgstr.
St-Jansstr.
Peerderstr.
Groenerei
Steenhouwersdijk
Freren
Fonteinstr.
Suvestr.
Kruitenbergerstr.
Eekhoutstraat
Garenmarket
Dijver
Langerei
Roperstraat
Gotje Elisabeth Zorghestr.
Molenmeers
Roeland
Genthof
Oude Gentweg

over the city every quarter hour, and several times a day in longer concerts during the summer. The tower itself stands 84m (272 ft.) high. Its lower section dates from around 1240, with the corner turrets added in the 14th century and the upper, octagonal section in the 15th century. If you have the stamina, climb the 366 steps to the Belfry's summit for a panoramic view of Bruges and the surrounding countryside all the way to the sea—you can pause for breath at the second-floor Treasury, where the town seal and charters were kept behind multiple wrought-iron grilles.

From the 13th to the 16th centuries, much of the city's commerce was conducted in the Hallen. They have recently been brought back into use as an exhibition center operated by a consortium of local art dealers. Just outside the Hallen is a bronze replica of the Belfry and the Hallen, with descriptions in English, French, German, and Dutch, and in Braille.

Markt. ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission 5€ ($6.25) adults, 3€ ($3.75) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

OTHER SIGHTS AROUND THE MARKT

The **sculpture group** in the center of the Markt depicts a pair of Flemish heroes, butcher Jan Breydel and weaver Pieter de Coninck. The two led an uprising in 1302 against the wealthy merchants and nobles who dominated the guilds, then went on to win an against-all-odds victory over French knights later that same year in the Battle of the Golden Spurs. The small, castlelike building called the **Craenenburg** (it's now a restaurant), on the corner of Sint Amandsstraat at Grote Markt, was used to imprison Crown Prince Maximilian of Austria in 1482. In exchange for that humiliation, Maximilian later on exacted a penalty from the citizens of Bruges that added a note of pure beauty to the city: He obliged them to keep swans in the canals forever. The large neo-Gothic **Provinciaal Hof (Provincial Palace House)** dates from the 1800s and houses the government of the province of West Flanders.

THE BURG

The Burg, a public square just steps away from the Markt, holds an array of beautiful buildings, which together add up to a trip through the history of architecture. On this site, Baldwin Iron Arm, Count of Flanders, once built a fortified castle (or "burg"), around which a village grew up that developed into Bruges.

Heilig-Bloedbasiliek (Basilica of the Holy Blood) ★★ A 12th-century Romanesque basilica with a Gothic upper floor, the church houses a venerated relic of Christ—and a mystery worthy of Indiana Jones. Since 1150, it has been the repository of a fragment of cloth stained with what is said to be the coagulated blood of Christ, wiped from his body after the crucifixion by Joseph of Arimathea. Legend says the cloth was brought to Bruges at the time of the Second Crusade by the Count of Flanders, Diederik van de Elzas, who received it

Moments Comparing Codpieces

Ahem, I mean, of course, that you can admire the finely carved suits of armor of the statues of Charles V, Maximilian, and Ferdinand II on the Renaissance chimneypiece in the Hall of the Liberty of Bruges in the Burg. (I say Charles's is the biggest.)

Fun Fact **Cool Guy**

The world's first diamond engagement ring was bestowed on Mary of Burgundy by Archduke Maximilian in Bruges in 1477.

from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. More probably it came from Constantinople, which in 1204 was sacked by the Crusader army of Count of Flanders Baldwin IX. Every year, in the colorful Procession of the Holy Blood on Ascension Day, the relic is carried through the streets, led by the bishop of Bruges and accompanied by costumed residents acting out biblical scenes.

The relic is embedded in a rock-crystal vial, which itself is inside a small glass cylinder adorned with a golden crown at each end. Normally, the relic is kept in a magnificent tabernacle, on which is an image of the "lamb of Christ," on a side altar in the upstairs chapel, but it is brought out regularly so that the faithful can kiss it. In the Basilica Museum, a reliquary created in 1617 by Bruges goldsmith Jan Crabbe has a gem-encrusted hexagonal case to hold the relic and at the top a golden statue of the Virgin. A second reliquary, from 1612, with a lid from 1716, is silver with a golden flower garland added in 1890.

Aside from the relic, the 12th-century basilica is well worth a visit for the richness of its design and its other treasures.

Burg 10. ✆ **050/33-67-92.** Admission: basilica free; museum 1.50€ ($1.90) adults, free for children under 12. Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–noon and 2–6pm (closed Wed afternoon); Oct–Mar daily 10am–noon and 2–4pm (closed Wed afternoon). Closed Jan 1, Nov 1, and Dec 25.

Landhuis van het Brugse Vrije (Palace of the Liberty of Bruges) Dating mostly from 1722 to 1727, when it replaced a 16th-century building as the seat of the Liberty of Bruges—the Liberty being the district around Bruges in the Middle Ages—the palace later became a courthouse and now houses the city council's administration. Inside, at no. 11A, is the **Renaissancezaal Brugse Vrije (Renaissance Hall of the Liberty of Bruges)** ★★, the Liberty's council chamber, which has been restored to its original 16th-century condition. The hall has a superb black marble fireplace decorated with an alabaster frieze and topped by an oak chimneypiece carved with statues of Emperor Charles V, who visited Bruges in 1515, and his grandparents: Emperor Maximilian of Austria, Duchess Mary of Burgundy, King Ferdinand II of Aragon, and Queen Isabella I of Castile.

Burg 11. ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission: courtyard free; Renaissance Hall 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

Stadhuis (Town Hall) ★ This beautiful Gothic structure was built in the late 1300s, making it the oldest town hall in Belgium. Don't miss the upstairs **Gotische Zaal (Gothic Room)** ★★ and its ornate decor and wall murals depicting highlights of Bruges's history. Most spectacular of all is the vaulted oak ceiling, dating from 1385 to 1402, which features scenes from the New Testament. The statues in the niches on the Town Hall facade are 1980s replacements for the originals, which had been painted by Jan van Eyck and were destroyed by the French in the 1790s.

Burg 12. ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

OTHER SIGHTS AROUND THE BURG

The recently restored **Oude Civiele Griffie (Old Civic Registry),** built beside the Town Hall as the offices of the Town Clerk, has the oldest Renaissance facade in the city, dating from 1534 to 1537, and now houses the city archives. Facing the Town Hall is the baroque **Proosdij (Provost's House)** from 1665 to 1666, which used to be the residence of the bishop of Bruges and is now occupied by government offices of West Flanders province. Next to this building is a romantic modern bronze sculpture, *The Lovers.*

One "attraction" you won't see on the square is the Cathedral of St. Donatian, which dated from around 950 and survived until anti-clerical, pro-French revolutionaries demolished it toward the end of the 18th century. You can sometimes visit what's left of the cathedral's foundations, in the cellar of the Crown Plaza Brugge Hotel.

TOP MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS

Groeninge Museum ★★★ The Groeninge ranks among Belgium's leading traditional museums of fine arts, with a collection that covers paintings in the Low Countries from the 15th to the 20th centuries. The Gallery of Flemish Primitives holds some 30 works—many of which are far from primitive—by painters such as Jan van Eyck (there's a portrait of his wife, Margerita van Eyck), Rogier van der Weyden, Hieronymus Bosch *(The Last Judgment),* and Hans Memling. Works by Magritte and Delvaux are also on display.

Dijver 12. ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission 8€ ($10) adults, 5€ ($8) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

Gruuthuse Museum ★ The Flemish nobleman and herb merchant Lodewijk Van Gruuthuse, who was a counselor to the Dukes of Burgundy in the 1400s, lived in this ornate Gothic mansion. Among the 2,500 numbered antiquities in the eclectic collection lodged in the house are paintings, sculptures, tapestries, lace, weapons, glassware, and richly carved furniture. Look out for the painted wooden bust of Habsburg Emperor Charles V in one of the rooms: It shows him as a fresh-faced kid, ready and raring to go to work on the political, military, and religious dilemmas of the empire—worries that were to age him quickly enough.

Dijver 17 (in a courtyard next to the Groeninge Museum). ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission 6€ ($7.50) adults, 4€ ($5) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

Kantcentrum (Lace Center) ★★ A combination workshop, museum, and sale room is where the ancient art of lace making is passed on to the next generation. You'll get a firsthand look at the artisans who will be making many of the items for future sale in all those lace stores. When you purchase lace, ideally you should specify that you want handmade lace, which is more expensive and of higher quality than the machine-made stuff. The most famous laces to look for are *bloemenwerk, rozenkant,* and *toversesteek.* Your ticket is valid also in the neighboring Jeruzalemkerk (Jerusalem Church; see "More Churches Worth a Visit" below.

Peperstraat 3A (at Jeruzalemstraat). ✆ **050/33-00-72.** www.kantcentrum.com. Admission 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 2€ ($2.50) seniors and children 7–11, free for children under 7. Mon–Fri 10am–noon and 2–6pm; Sat 10am–noon and 2–5pm. Bus: 6 or 16 to Langestraat.

Memling Museum ★★ This museum is housed in the former Sint-Janshospitaal (Hospital of St. John), where the earliest wards date from the 13th

century. To get a sense of the vastness of the wards when this was a functioning hospital, take a look at the old painting near the entrance that shows small, efficient bed units set into cubicles along the walls. The 17th-century Apothecary in the cloisters near the entrance is furnished exactly as it was when this building's main function was to care for the sick. It's worth lingering a while in fine weather in the hospital's courtyard, a pleasant place with benches and flowers.

Nowadays visitors come to see the typical medieval hospital buildings filled with furniture and other objects that illustrate their history, as well as the magnificent collection of paintings by the German-born artist Hans Memling (ca. 1440–94), who moved to Bruges from Brussels in 1465 and became one of the city's most prominent residents. At this museum you find such Memling masterpieces as the three-paneled altarpiece of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, which consists of the paintings *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine,* the *Shrine of St Ursula,* and *Virgin with Child and Apple.*

Mariastraat 38. ✆ **050/44-87-11.** Admission 8€ ($10) adults, 5€ ($7.50) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25.

Stedelijk Museum voor Volkskunde (Municipal Folklore Museum) ★ Housed in the low whitewashed houses of the former Shoemakers Guild Almshouse, the Folklore Museum aims to re-create life in Bruges in times gone by. Exhibits depict a primary-school class, cooper's and milliner's workshops, a spice store and a candy store, and everyday household scenes. A new emphasis is on the history of the important regional textile industry. Most refreshing of all is an old inn, De Zwarte Kat (The Black Cat), which has real beer on tap. In summer children and adults can play traditional games in the garden.

Balstraat 43 (at Rolweg). ✆ **050/44-87-64.** Admission 3€ ($3.75) adults, 2€ ($2.50) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday). Closed Jan 1, Ascension Day afternoon, and Dec 25. Bus: 6 to Kruispoort.

HISTORIC CHURCHES

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady) ★★ It took 2 centuries (from the 13th to the 15th) to build this church, whose soaring 118m (387-ft.) spire can be seen from miles around Bruges. Among the many art treasures here is a beautiful Carrara marble sculpture of the ***Madonna and Child*** ★★★ by Michelangelo. This statue, made in 1504, was the only one of Michelangelo's works to leave Italy in his lifetime and is today one of the few that can be seen outside Italy. It was bought by a Bruges merchant, Jan van Mouskroen, and donated to the church in 1506.

The church also holds a painting of the *Crucifixion* by Anthony Van Dyck, and the impressive side-by-side bronze **tomb sculptures** ★ of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, who died in 1477, and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, who died at age 25 after falling from her horse in 1482. A windowpane under the tombs allows you to view the 13th- and 14th-century graves of priests.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerkhof Zuid. ✆ **050/34-53-14.** Admission: Church and Madonna and Child altar free; chapel of Charles and Mary and Museum 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) seniors and ages 13–26, free for children under 13. Mon–Fri 9am–12:30pm and 1:30–5pm; Sat 9am–12:30pm and 1:30–4pm; Sun 1:30–5pm.

Sint-Salvatorskathedraal (Holy Savior's Cathedral) This mainly Gothic church with a 100m (325-ft.) belfry has been Bruges's cathedral since 1834 (its predecessor, Saint Donatian's in the Burg, was demolished by the French around 1800). The 15th-century wooden choir stalls flanking the altar

bear a complete set of escutcheons of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, who held a chapter meeting here in 1478. The Cathedral Museum (open Mon–Fri 2–5pm, Sun 3–5pm) houses the *Martyrdom of St. Hippolytus* by Dirk Bouts with a side panel by Hugo van der Goes, as well as the Cathedral Treasury of gold and silver religious vessels, reliquaries, and Episcopal vestments.

Sint-Salvatorskerkhof (off of Steenstraat). ✆ **050/33-68-41.** Admission: Cathedral free; Treasury 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) seniors and students, free for children under 13 free. Museum Tues–Fri 8:30–11:45am; Sun–Fri 2–5:45pm; Sat 8:30–11:45am and 2–3:30pm; Sun 9–10:15am; closed to casual visitors during services. Treasury: Sun–Fri 2–5pm.

MORE CHURCHES WORTH A VISIT

There's no shortage of notable churches in Bruges, but as there's also no shortage of other places to see, you probably won't want to spend all your time visiting them. Anyone with a particular interest in churches, however, should try to visit a few of these.

The magnificent **Sint-Walburgakerk (St. Walburga's Church)** ★, in Sint-Maartensplein, dating from the period 1619 to 1643, is one of the few baroque monuments in this Gothic-fixated city. It has a satisfying amount of marble and a notable altar, pulpit, and communion bench. Sint-Walburgakerk was the Jesuit church of Bruges until 1774.

The wealthy merchant Adornes family constructed the **Jeruzalemkerk (Jerusalem Church)** ★, Peperstraat 3 (✆ **050/33-00-72**), beside the Lace Center (see above), between 1471 and 1483, along the lines of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. A replica of Christ's Tomb is in the crypt underneath the choir. The church is open Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm, and Saturday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm. Admission to the Lace Center allows you to visit this church as well.

Also owing much of its ornamentation to wealthy benefactors is **Sint-Jakobskerk (St. James's Church),** in Sint-Jakobsplein. This heavy-looking 15th-century Gothic construction has an intricately carved wooden pulpit, with figures at the base representing the continents.

Founded in 1276 as a hospice, **Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Potterie (Our Lady of the Pottery),** Potterierei 78–79, is now a home for seniors. Today part of it houses the Potterie Museum (✆ **050/44-87-11**), which has a collection of tapestries, 15th- to 17th-century furniture, silverware, religious objects, and books, and early Flemish paintings. The adjoining 14th-century church, with a fine baroque interior, was the Potters Guild chapel. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm (open Easter Monday and Pentecost Monday; closed Jan 1, Ascension Day [fifth Thurs after Easter] afternoon, and Dec 25). Admission is 2.50€ ($3.15) for adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) for seniors and ages 13 to 26, and free for children under 13.

PARKS & GARDENS

Through the centuries, since it was founded in 1245 by the Countess Margaret of Constantinople, the **Prinselijk Begijnhof ten Wijngaarde (Princely Beguinage of the Vineyard)** ★★★, Wijngaardstraat (✆ **050/33-00-11**), at the Lake of Love, has been one of the most tranquil spots in Bruges, and so it remains today. Flemish *begijnhofen* are UNESCO World Heritage sites, so even if the entire old center of Bruges didn't already have this prestigious status, the Begijnhof would have been marked out as being special. *Begijns* were religious women, similar to nuns, who accepted vows of chastity and obedience, but drew the line at poverty, preferring to earn a living by looking after the sick and

Moments Strolling the Back Streets

You don't need to visit the top 10 highlights to enjoy Bruges. Shut your guidebook, put away the street map, and just wander off of the beaten track, taking time out to make your own discoveries. Bruges's residents live their everyday lives in absurdly beautiful surroundings and don't need to put on a show for the tourists.

making lace. They provided an option for women to live without a husband and children, but without becoming a nun—there was little in the way of alternatives at the time.

The *begijns* are no more, but the Begijnhof is occupied by the Benedictine nuns of the Monasterium De Wijngaard, who try to keep the *begijns'* traditions alive. This beautiful little cluster of 17th-century whitewashed houses surrounding a lawn with poplar trees and flowers makes a marvelous escape from the hustle and bustle of the outside world. One of the houses, the **Begijnhuisje (Beguine's House),** has been made over into a museum and can be visited, as can the convent's baroque church, **Onze Lieve Vrouw van Troost van Spermalie (Our Lady of Succor of Spermalie),** during a service. The Begijnhof courtyard is always open and admission is free. The Beguine's House is open from March to November, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm, Sunday from 10:45am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm; from December to February, Monday, Tuesday, and Friday from 11am to noon and 1:45 to 4:15pm, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:45 to 4:15pm, Saturday from 10am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm, Sunday from 10:45am to noon and 1:45 to 5:30pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) for seniors, and 1€ ($1.25) for students and children.

A fine example of the *godshuizen* (houses of god, or almshouses) that were built by the rich in Bruges from the 13th century onward as refuges for widows and the poor, is the **Godshuis de Vos (De Vos Almshouse),** from 1713, at the corner of Noordstraat and Wijngaardstraat, near the Begijnhof. The moneybags weren't being entirely altruistic, since the residents had to pray for their benefactors' souls twice a day in the chapel that was an integral part of an almshouse's facilities. The pretty courtyard garden here is surrounded by a chapel and eight original houses, now converted to six, which are owned by the city and occupied by seniors. Admission is not permitted, but you can view the complex from over a low wall out front.

Even these locations are not necessarily tranquil retreats. There's likely to be plenty of other people around at all of them. To really escape the crowds for a while and yet stay in the center, you could take a stroll in the **Koningin Astridpark (Queen Astrid Park),** just a few blocks south of the Burg and the busy Rozenhoedkaai. In what were once the grounds of a Franciscan Abbey that is no more, you might even take in a concert at the graceful cast-iron bandstand from 1859 in the middle of the park—though in that case you likely won't be enjoying the experience alone.

OTHER SIGHTS OF INTEREST

Diamantmuseum (Diamond Museum) Diamond cutting and polishing has been an important local industry for centuries, ever since Antwerp dealers, looking for cheap skilled labor, brought the craft to Bruges. The technique of

polishing diamonds using diamond powder on a rotating disk may have been invented by the Bruges goldsmith Lodewijk van Berquem around 1450. This museum focuses on the history of diamond cutting and polishing in Bruges, with demonstrations and displays of the equipment the craftspeople employ.

Katelijnestraat 43B (at Oude Gentweg). ✆ **050/34-20-56.** www.diamondmuseum.be. Admission: museum 6€ ($7.50) adults, 3€ ($3.75) students and children; diamond-polishing demonstration and museum 9€ ($11) adults, 6€ ($7.50) students and children. Daily 10:30am–5:30pm; diamond-polishing demonstration daily 12:15pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25.

Hof Bladelin (Bladelin House) This 15th-century mansion, which is now a home for seniors, was built by Pieter Bladelin, treasurer to Duke Philip the Good. The Medici Bank of Florence took over in 1466 and gave the place an Italian look, particularly in the courtyard, which is thought to be the earliest example of the Renaissance style in the Low Countries. On the facade are medallions depicting Lorenzo de Medici and his wife Clarice Orsini.

Naaldenstraat 19. ✆ **050/33-64-34.** Admission free; donation appreciated. Daily 9am–noon and 2–6pm (mansion visits by prior appointment).

CITY GATES

The now-vanished city wall once boasted nine powerfully fortified gates dating from the 14th century. The four that survive are (clockwise from the rail station) the imposing **Smedenpoort; Ezelpoort,** which is famed for the many swans that grace the moat beside it; **Kruispoort,** which looks more like a castle with a drawbridge; and **Gentpoort,** now reduced in status to a traffic obstacle. Only one defensive tower remains, the **Poertoren,** which was used as a gunpowder store and overlooks the Minnewater (Lake of Love).

WINDMILLS

The park that marks the line of the city walls between Kruispoort and Dampoort in the northeast is occupied by a row of very photogenic windmills. They are (from south to north) the **Bonne Chière Mill,** built in 1888 at Olsene in East Flanders and moved here in 1911; **Sint-Janshuismolen,** built in 1770 and open free to the public from April to September daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm; **Nieuwe Papegaai Mill,** an oil mill rebuilt here in 1970; and **Koeleweymolen,** dating from 1765, rebuilt here in 1996 and open free to the public from June to September daily from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5pm.

BREWERY TOURS

De Gouden Boom Brewery Museum Bruges's second major brewery has been operating in this area since 1587. The old malt house, which holds the museum, dates from 1902, and still has its beer vats and other equipment in place. Exhibits here feature not only the museum's parent brewery, but also the other 31 breweries that were in operation in the city at the turn of the 20th century. From here it's just a quick shuffle to Langestraat 45, and the **brewery** itself, which can only be visited by guided tour. Here you can see such popular beers as Brugse Tarwebier, Brugse Tripel, and Abdij Steenbrugge being brought to life, and get to taste some of the finished product. Tours are by prior arrangement only.

Verbrand Nieuwland 10. ✆ **050/31-15-04.** www.degoudenboom.com. Admission 3.50€ ($4.40). May–Sept Wed–Sun 2–6pm.

De Halve Maan Brewery ★ The brewery here was mentioned in dispatches as early as 1546, and has been in use in "modern" times since 1856. Today it

produces the famous (in Belgium) Straffe Hendrik beer, a strapping blond brew that can be sampled in the brewery's own brasserie—it has a clean, heavenly taste.

Walplein 26. ✆ **050/33-26-97.** www.halvemaan.be. Admission 3.70€ ($4.65). Guided visits Apr–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–Mar daily 11am and 3pm.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

The **Boudewijnpark & Dolfinarium,** A. De Baeckestraat 12 (✆ **050/40-84-08;** www.dolfinarium.be; bus: 7 or 17), in the southern suburb of Sint-Michiels, is a big favorite with children, who for some reason seem to prefer its rides, paddleboats, dolphins, and sea lions to Bruges's many historic treasures. Strange but true! Admission is 19€ ($24) for adults and children over 1m (39 in.) tall, 16€ ($20) for seniors, and free for children under 1m (39 in.) tall. The park is open June to August daily from 10:30am to 5pm, and during Easter week and weekends in September from 11am to 5pm; and the Dolfinarium is open intermittently at other times.

In the eastern suburbs, the **Kinderboerderij de Zeven Torentjes (Seven Towers Children's Farm),** Canadaring 41, Assebroek (✆ **050/35-40-43;** bus: 2), is a 14th-century manor farm that has been transformed into a children's farm, with pigs, hens, horses, and other animals. All the buildings—farmhouse, barns, coach house, bakery, and more—have been restored and a large play park added. An on-site cafeteria has a kid-friendly menu. A 16th-century dovecote has niches for 650 doves. The farm is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5:15pm, Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and Sunday from 1 to 6pm. Admission is free.

Both the theme park and the farm can be reached by bus from the rail station and from the Markt.

ORGANIZED TOURS & EXCURSIONS

If you'd like a trained, knowledgeable guide to accompany you in Bruges, the tourist office can provide one for 50€ ($63) for the first 2 hours, and 25€ ($31) for each additional hour. Or, in July and August, you can join a daily guided tour at 3pm, which leaves from the tourist office; it is 5€ ($6.25) for adults and free for children under 14. For self-guided tours, audio guides with taped details in English are available from the tourist office for 8€ ($10) for one or two people.

A must for every visitor is a **boat trip** ★★★ on the city canals. There are several departure points, all marked with an anchor icon on maps available at the tourist office. The boats operate March to November daily 10am to 6pm, and December to February on weekends, school holidays, and public holidays from 10am to 6pm (except if the canals are frozen!). A half-hour cruise is 5.20€ ($6.50) for adults, 2.60€ ($3.25) for children ages 4 to 11, and free for children under 4. Wear something warm if the weather is cold or windy.

Another lovely way to tour Bruges is by **horse-drawn carriage.** From March to November they are stationed in the Burg (on Wed in the Markt). A 30-minute ride is 28€ ($34).

Fifty-minute minibus tours with **Sightseeing Lines** (✆ **050/35-50-24;** www.citytour.be) depart hourly every day from the Markt: January, February, and December from 10am to 4pm; March and April from 10am to 5pm; May and June from 9am to 7pm; July to September from 9am to 8pm; October and November from 10am to 6pm. The tours are 12€ ($14) for adults, 6€ ($7.50) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

Folklore Events in Bruges

One of the most popular and colorful folklore events in Belgium is Bruges's **Heilig-Bloedprocessie (Procession of the Holy Blood),** which dates back to at least 1291 and takes place every year on Ascension Day. During the procession, the bishop of Bruges proceeds through the city streets carrying the golden shrine containing the Relic of the Holy Blood (see "The Burg" earlier in this chapter). Residents wearing Burgundian-era and biblical costumes follow the relic, acting out biblical and historical scenes along the way.

Every 3 years the canals of Bruges are the subject and location of a festival called the **Reiefeest.** This evening event is a combination of historical tableaux, dancing, open-air concerts, and lots of eating and drinking. It takes place on six nonconsecutive days in August. The next Reiefeest is due in 2007.

The **Praalstoet van de Gouden Boom (Golden Tree Pageant)** recalls the great procession and tournament held in the Markt to celebrate the marriage of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, to Margaret of York in 1468. It takes place every 5 years or so, in the last half of August, and the next one will be in 2007.

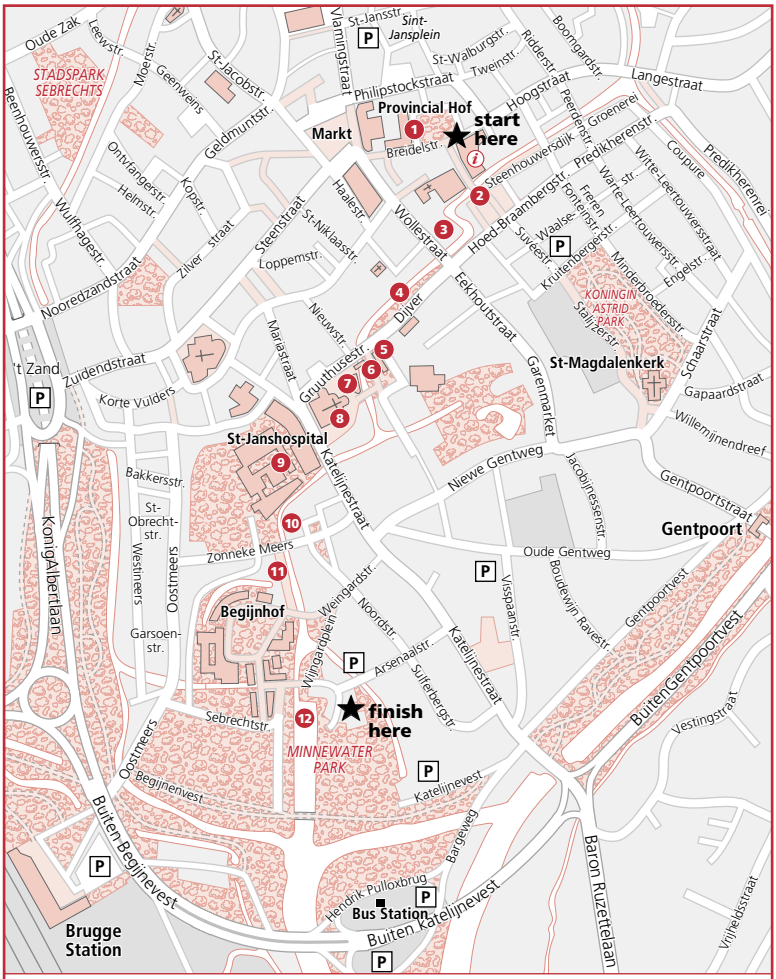
From March to October you can get some exercise and at the same time visit little-known parts of Bruges, or head out of town to explore the nearby flat Flemish countryside and the village of Damme on a bike tour, with a commentary in English, led by the **QuasiMundo Bike Tours Brugge** (✆ **050/33-07-75;** www.quasimundo.com). You can choose a city bike or mountain bike. Tours are 18€ ($23) for adults 16€ ($20) for those under 26, and free for children under 8. Call ahead to make a reservation. The meeting and departure point is the Burg.

WALKING TOUR THROUGH THE HEART OF BRUGES

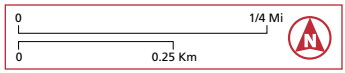
Start:	The Burg.
Finish:	Lake of Love.
Time:	3 to 4 hours.
Best Times:	Saturday and Sunday afternoons from March to October, when you can take in the flea market in the Dijver.
Worst Times:	There's really no worst time to do this tour (other than during the night, I guess, and even then it would have its charm). But the museums will be closed in the evenings and on Mondays, so if you should want to take in one or more, you'd need to avoid these times.

This tour takes in some of Bruges's most stellar sights, as it follows the canals from the city center to the beautiful lake and park to the south. So small is Bruges that you could actually walk this route in less than an hour at a leisurely pace, but you should take time to visit in depth at least one of the places described on the way.

Walking Tour: Through the Heart of Bruges



Information
Parking



1 The Burg
2 Huidenvettersplein
3 Rozenhoedkaai
4 Dijver
5 Groeninge Museum
6 Hof Arents
7 Palace of the Lords of Gruuthuse
8 The Church of Our Lady
9 St. John's Hospital
10 Walplein
11 Beguine Convent (Begijnhof)
12 Lake of Love (Minnewater)

❶ The Burg

Walk through Blinde Ezelstraat (the street name, bafflingly, means "Blind Donkey Street"), the vaulted passageway to the left of the Town Hall (as you face it) and cross the canal to Steenhouwersdijk, passing one of the canal-boat jetties. To your left are the columns of the covered Vismarkt (Fish Market), dating from 1821 during the period of Dutch rule, where fresh fish from the North Sea is sold on mornings from Tuesday to Saturday.

Turn right into the little square called:

❷ Huidenvettersplein

The square is surrounded by restaurants. One of them is the former Tanners' Guildhouse, the Ambachtshuis der Huideveters, at nos. 10 and 11, dating from 1631.

Continue through Huidenvettersplein to:

❸ Rozenhoedkaai

From here you have beautiful views across the canal, with the top of the Belfry looming above. Pass by the Sint-Jan Nepomucenus Bridge and its 1767 statue of the Czech martyr, who happens to be the patron saint of bridges (the connection arises from his having been tossed off of one in Prague for offending the king).

Keep going along the canal to:

❹ The Dijver

This tree-shaded canalside is where the weekend flea market takes place. Across the canal you can see the rear of the former Carthusian Convent and some fine old mansions. Note the Europa College at no. 11, where international students learn everything there is to know and love about the new Europe.

At no. 12 is an entranceway leading along a path to the:

❺ Groeninge Museum

The municipal fine-arts museum is right up there among the leading art museums in Belgium. It houses a major collection of paintings by the 15th-century "Flemish Primitives" (see "Top Museums & Attractions" earlier in this chapter).

Cross the Arents Park outside the Groeninge Museum to the:

❻ Hof Arents

An 18th-century mansion that houses the Brangwyn Museum, it is dedicated to the English artist Frank Brangwyn. Note the four modern sculptures of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the little park. On the west side of the park is the tiny Bonifatius Bridge, which affords views redolent of the back streets of Venice.

Cross over to the:

❼ Palace of the Lords of Gruuthuse

The stately 15th-century home of the family that held the monopoly on *gruut,* an herbal mixture added to beer, is today the palace that houses the Gruuthuse Museum (see "Top Museums & Attractions" earlier in this chapter). Come out into Gruuthusestraat and turn left, past Guido Gezelleplein, where there's a statue of the Bruges priest and poet Guido Gezelle (1830–99), among the foremost 19th-century Flemish writers.

Outside again, on Guido Gezelleplein, you can:

TAKE A BREAK
Maria van Boergondië, Guido Gezelleplein 1 (✆ **050/33-20-66**), is a Flemish restaurant where the cuisine is as traditional as the cozy dining room with timber-beam ceiling.

Turning left into Mariastraat, you come to:

❽ Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady)

Dating from the 13th to 15th centuries, this imposing edifice contains the not-to-be-missed sculpture of the *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo (see "Historic Churches" earlier in this chapter).

When you come out of the Our Lady church, make a diversion a few dozen steps to your left, for a look at the pink Jugendstil facade and the murals of *Day* and *Night* on the houses at Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerkhof-Zuid 6–8.

Back across Mariastraat is the entrance to:

❾ Sint-Janshospitaal (St. John's Hospital)

The history of this former hospital stretches back to the 12th century. Today the building houses, among other things, the Memling Museum, with the best-known works of the 15th-century Bruges-based painter Hans Memling (see "Top Museums & Attractions" earlier in this chapter).

Continue into Katelijnestraat, then turn right into Stoofstraat, which leads to:

❿ Walplein

In this handsome square is both a sculpture giving a modern take on the ancient tale of Leda and the Swan (aka Zeus) and also the Halve Maan/Straffe Hendrik Brewery, which you can visit on a guided tour (you also get to sample some of its excellent Straffe Hendrik beer).

Continue through Walplein into Wijngaardstraat, then turn right across the canal bridge, through the neoclassical gateway, to the:

⓫ Begijnhof (Beguine Convent)

Founded in 1245 as a retreat for pious lay women and now a Benedictine convent, this is one of the most tranquil and beautiful spots in Bruges.

Leave the Begijnhof by its southern exit, which brings you to the:

⓬ Minnewater (Lake of Love)

Bruges's old inner harbor, or *Binnen Water,* has been transformed into a scenic lake, and its name has been magically transmuted to its present, beautiful mistranslation.

WINDING DOWN

Kasteel Minnewater, Minnewater 4 (✆ **050/33-52-44**), in the leafy Minnewater Park on the east side of the lake, is a château-style restaurant with a waterside terrace that in fine weather makes the ideal place to end your tour through the heart of Bruges (see "Where to Dine" earlier in this chapter).

6 Shopping

No one comes here for stylish shopping—for that you need Brussels or Antwerp. What Bruges is famous for is **lace.** If you're willing to be seduced by the lace stores in just one Belgian town, make it Bruges. You can still find plenty of the genuine article here. Most of it is machine-made, but there's still plenty of genuine, high-quality (if expensive) handmade lace to be found. The most famous lace styles are *bloemenwerk, rozenkant,* and *toversesteek.* Souvenirs of a more perishable nature include Oud-Brugge **cheese,** and local **beers** such as Straffe Hendrick, Brugse Tarwebier, and Brugse Tripel. The contents of a stone bottle of ***jenever*** (gin) and a box of handmade chocolate **pralines** should also go down well.

Upmarket stores and boutiques can be found in the streets around the Markt and 't Zand, including Geldmuntstraat, Noordzandstraat, Steenstraat, Zuidzandstraat, and Vlamingstraat. There are souvenir, lace, and small specialty stores all over. Most stores are open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm, with late-night shopping to 9pm on Friday. Many also open on Sunday, especially in summer.

SHOPPING A TO Z

Shopping in Bruges caters primarily, but not exclusively, to tourist tastes and needs. Here's a short list of interesting and useful stores.

ANTIQUES

Antiek Fimmers-Van der Cruysse Sells fine antiques and silverware. Sint-Salvatorskerkhof 18. ✆ **050/34-20-25.**

APPAREL

Artlux For fine leather goods, such as handbags and gloves. Simon Stevinplein 1. ✆ **050/33-60-95.**

Inno This is Bruges's main department store, which sells a wide range of goods. Steenstraat 11–13. ✆ **050/33-06-03.**

BOOKS

Brugse Boekhandel K. Demester Stocks a moderate range of English-language books, with the focus on travel guides, as well as maps, newspapers, and magazines. Dijver 2. ✆ **050/33-29-52.**

DIAMONDS

Brugs Diamanthuis ★ This store, which is housed in a handsome building dating from 1518, sells a sparkling array of fine diamonds. The company has a second store at Katelijnestraat 43. Cordoeaniersstraat 5 (off Vlamingstraat). ✆ **050/34-41-60.**

FOOD & DRINK

Malesherbes A French delicatessen, with all that implies in terms of taste and the range of artisanal products. It has a *salon de dégustation,* for tasting its fine pâté, cheese, and wine. Stoofstraat 3–5. ✆ **050/33-69-24.**

Van Tilborgh The owner's lip-smacking pralines are made from her own recipe. Noordzandstraat 1b. ✆ **050/33-59-04.**

Woolstreet Company One of several stores in this street selling a wide range of Belgian beers, mainly locally produced. Wollestraat 31A. ✆ **050/34-83-83.**

GIFTS

Callebert Should you tire of the traditional in Bruges, you can shop here for stylish, modern gifts. Wollestraat 25. ✆ **050/33-50-61.**

LACE

Kantuweeltje You can see fine lace pieces being made by hand at this lace and tapestry specialist, in business since 1895. Philipstockstraat 11. ✆ **050/33-42-25.**

Selection Selection is representative of the better Bruges lace stores in that it offers a good range of handmade lace. Breidelstraat 10–12. ✆ **050/33-11-86.**

MARKETS

The **Antiques and Flea Market** on Dijver is a fine show in a scenic location beside the canal. It runs from March to October, on Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5pm. There are also **general markets** in the Markt, every Wednesday 7am to 1pm, and in 't Zand and nearby Beursplein every Saturday 7am to 1pm.

The **fish market** in the colonnaded **Vismarkt** dating from 1821 may be less important, though you can buy ready-to-eat prawns and raw herring filleted and served fresh and raw with onions here—these won't make you popular with anyone you happen to breathe on for hours afterward, but they taste great. The market is interesting to watch; it takes place Tuesday to Saturday from 8am to 1pm.

7 Bruges After Dark

For information on what to do after dark, get the free monthly brochure ***Exit*** and the free monthly newsletter ***Agenda Brugge*** from the tourist office, hotels,

and performance venues. The monthly newspaper ***Brugge Cultuurmagazine,*** also free and available at these locations, is in Dutch, but its performance dates and venue details are fairly easy to follow.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

The new, ultramodern **Concertgebouw,** 't Zand (✆ **050/47-69-99;** www.concertgebouw.be), which opened in 2002, nicely in time for Bruges's reign as European Capital of Culture, is the main venue for opera, classical music, theater, and dance, all of which take place regularly throughout the year. This has left the **Koninklijke Stadsschouwburg (Royal Municipal Theater),** Vlamingstraat 29 (✆ **050/44-30-60**), from 1869, the former principal venue for these events in Bruges, to back up the new mother-ship by mounting smaller-scale performances. Note that theater at both venues is likely to be in Dutch, or French, and rarely if ever in English.

Another important venue is the **Joseph Ryelandtzaal,** Achiel Van Ackerplein (✆ **050/44-86-86**). Smaller-scale events, such as recitals, are often held at the **Prinsenhof,** Prinsenhof 8 (✆ **050/34-50-93**), which used to be the palace of the Dukes of Burgundy, as well as at **Sint-Salvatorskathedraal, Sint-Jakobskerk,** and other churches.

Theater pieces—mostly in Dutch—are performed at theater **Het Net,** Sint-Jacobsstraat 36 (✆ **050/33-88-50**), which also has a puppet theater, **Marionettentheater Brugge,** for what is a sophisticated, centuries-old art.

A different kind of theater is on the menu at **Brugge Anno 1468 (Bruges Year 1468),** Celebrations Entertainment, Vlamingstraat 86 (✆ **050/34-75-72;** www.celebrations-entertainment.be), at the corner of Kipstraat. In the atmospheric setting of the neo-Gothic former Heilige-Hartkerk (Sacred Heart Church), from 1885, which belonged to the Jesuit Order, actors reenact the wedding of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, to Margaret of York. Jesters, minstrels, dancers, falconers, fire-eaters, and more do their various things while visitors pile into a four-course medieval banquet, "washed down" with copious amounts of beer and wine. Performances are April to October, Friday and Saturday from 7:30 to 10pm; November to March, Saturday from 7:30 to 10pm. Two admission packages are available: "Royal" and "Merchant." These are, respectively, 73€ and 57€ ($91 and $71) from November to March, and Friday April to October; 74€ and 59€ ($93 and $74) Saturday April to October; cost for children ages 11 to 14 is 50% of the adult rate; cost for children ages 6 to 10 is 13€ ($16); free for children under 6.

LIVE-MUSIC CLUBS

The locally renowned **Cactus Club,** Sint-Sebastiaan 4 (✆ **050/33-20-14;** www.cactusmusic.be), presents an eclectic concert schedule of underground, rock, country, funk, jazz, and other music at its new, larger premises opened in 2004, **Cactus Club@Ma/Z,** Magdalenastraat, in the Sint-Andries district (and occasionally at other venues around town, including at the Concertgebouw). Try **De Vuurmolen,** Kraanplein 5 (✆ **050/33-00-79**), for a raucous dancing-on-the-tables kind of night; it's open nightly 10pm until the wee hours. **Ma Rica Rokk,** 't Zand 7–8 (✆ **050/33-83-58**), is another bar with dancing; it attracts a young techno-oriented crowd nightly 7pm to 4am (9pm–6am weekends). A good gay-friendly place is the bar/disco **Ravel,** Karel de Stoutelaan 172 (✆ **050/31-52-74**), open Wednesday and Friday to Monday from 10pm. **Vino Vino,** Grauwwerkersstraat 15 (✆ **050/34-51-15**), somehow manages to successfully

combine Spanish tapas and the blues. For jazz, from bebop to modern, you can't do better than **De Versteende Nacht,** Langestraat 11 (✆ **050/34-32-93**).

BARS

't Brugs Beertje ★, Kemelstraat 5 (✆ **050/33-96-16**), is a traditional cafe that serves more than 300 different kinds of beer. **'t Dreupelhuisje,** Kemelstraat 9 (✆ **050/34-24-21**), does something similar with *jenever,* stocking dozens of artisanal examples of this deadly art. **Gran Kaffee De Passage,** Dweersstraat 26 (✆ **050/34-02-32**), is a quiet and elegant cafe that serves inexpensive meals.

8 Side Trips from Bruges

DAMME ★

7km (4½ miles) E of Bruges

This pretty and historic village was once the city's outer harbor, where seagoing ships loaded and unloaded their cargoes, until the Zwin inlet silted up in 1520. The marriage of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York was celebrated here in 1468—which indicates the importance of Damme at the time. Today visitors come to see the picturesque Markt, which holds a statue of native Jacob van Maerlant, the "father of Flemish poetry," and the beautiful canalside scenery en route from Bruges. It's easily possible to make a day trip to Damme, including lunch at one of the town's restaurants.

THE ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Getting to Damme is half the delight. One of the nicest ways is to take the small stern-wheel paddle steamer *Lamme Goedzaak.* Departures are from the Noorweegse Kaai in the north of Bruges, five times daily from April to September. The delightful half-hour trip along the poplar-lined canal takes you past a landscape straight out of an old Flemish painting. Round-trip tickets are 6.50€ ($8.15) for adults, 5.50€ ($6.90) for seniors, 4.50€ ($5.65) for children ages 3 to 12, and free for children under 3. For schedules and booking, contact **Rederij Damme–Brugge** (✆ **050/35-33-19**).

You can also take one of the minibuses of the **Sightseeing Line** (✆ **050/35-50-24;** www.citytour.be). The 2-hour tours run from April to September, at 2pm and 4pm from the Markt, returning from Damme on the paddle steamer *Lamme Goedzaak.* Round-trip tickets are 17€ ($21) for adults and 8.25€ ($10) for children.

Public transportation buses depart six times daily in July and August, and three times daily from September to June, Monday to Saturday, from the rail station and the Markt in Bruges to Damme Town Hall.

You can also drive, bike, or even walk from Bruges to Damme, along Daamse Vaart Zuid from Dampoort in Bruges.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Damme** is located at Jacob van Maerlantstraat 3, 8340 Damme (✆ **050/35-33-19;** fax 050/37-00-21; www.vvv damme.be), facing the Stadhuis (Town Hall) in the Markt.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The Gothic **Town Hall (Stadhuis)** in the Markt dates from 1464 to 1468. On its facade are statues of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, among other historic notables. In front of it stands a statue of the poet Jacob van Maerlant (1230–96), who wrote his most important works in Damme.

Across from the Town Hall, at Jacob van Maerlantstraat 3, is the 15th-century mansion called **De Groote Sterre.** This was the Spanish governor's residence in the

17th century and is now occupied by the Damme Tourist Office, the **Uilenspiegel Museum,** and the **Van Hinsberg Forge and Foundry Museum.** Uilenspiegel is a 14th-century German folk-tale character who came to Damme by a roundabout route and has been adopted by the village. The museums are open from May to September, Monday to Friday 9am to noon and 2 to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; October to April, Monday to Friday 9am to noon and daily from 2 to 5pm. At Jacob van Maerlantstraat 13, is a 15th-century mansion, the **Saint-Jean d'Angély House** ★, where in 1468 Charles the Bold married Margaret of York.

In Kerkstraat, which runs south from the Markt, the Gothic **St. John's Hospital (Sint-Janshospitaal)** at no. 33 is a hospital for the poor, endowed in 1249 by Countess Margaret of Constantinople, and the **Church of Our Lady (Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk),** dating from around 1340.

Across the bridge over the Bruges-Sluis Canal, at Dammesteenweg 1, is the 18th-century whitewashed **De Christoffelhoeve (St. Christopher's Farm).** Note the ornamental gate and the monumental barn with its mansard roof. A little way to the west along Daamse Vaart West is the **Schellemolen,** a windmill built in 1867.

Beside the jetty where the *Lamme Goedzak* ties up is a modern **sculpture group** featuring the legend of Tijl Uilenspiegel.

WHERE TO DINE

Damme has several excellent restaurants on or near its main street, Kerkstraat, that are worth the short drive or canal-boat trip. Among them are **Gasthof Maerlant,** Kerkstraat 21 (✆ **050/35-29-52**), which serves a "market menu" for 25€ ($31); **Restaurant De Lieve,** Jacob van Maerlantstraat 10 (✆ **050/35-66-30**), which specializes in seasonal cuisine, with menus from 25€ to 40€ ($31–$50); and the atmospheric **Restaurant Pallieter,** Kerkstraat 12 (✆ **050/35-46-75**), which has a specialty of saddle of lamb Dijonnaise, and offers menus ranging up to 35€ ($44).

OSTEND ★★

20km (12 miles) W of Bruges

The Queen of the Coast's glitter has faded since its 19th-century heyday as a royal vacation spot and prestigious European watering hole, but plenty of reasons remain to justify a visit to Ostend (*Oostende* in Dutch; *Ostende* in French). Great sandy beaches, a casino, a racetrack, art museums, a spa, good shopping, an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool, outdoor pools filled with heated seawater, sailing and windsurfing, and last but by no means least, a legitimate reputation of being a seafood cornucopia, all draw visitors to Belgium's most popular beach resort. This busy port and lively recreational haven (pop. 70,000) is very much a people's queen now, welcoming all income levels.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains depart from Bruges at least every half-hour for the 15-minute trip to Oostende Station, Stationsplein (✆ **059/70-15-17**), an extravagant neo-baroque edifice from 1913 beside the harbor. By car from Bruges, take A10/E40 west.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Oostende,** Monacoplein 2, 8400 Oostende (✆ **059/70-11-99;** fax 059/70-34-77; www.toerisme-oostende.be), is open May to October, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 7pm, and Sunday from 10am to 7pm; November to April, Monday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm, and

Ostend

ATTRACTIONS
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Fine Arts Museum 9
Fish Market 11
James Ensorhuis 6
Mercator 14
North Sea Aquarium 12
Provincial Modern Art Museum 15
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Oosthelling
Westhelling
Hertstr.
Christinhastr.
Louisastraat
Vlaanderenstraat
Kapucijnenstraat
Hofstraat
Londenstr.
Boekarestr.
Zeheldenplein
Cirkelstraat
Nieuwstraat
Minplein
Langestraat
Brabanstraat
Wapenplein
Breidelstr.
Dwarsstr.
Kaaistraat
Kerkstraat
Ooststraat
Nonnenstr.
Witte
Poststr.
Christinhastr.
St-Paulusstraat
P. Boudewijnstr.
Straat
Dekenijstr.
Zuidstr.
Vissersplein
Vissersskaai
Montgomerydok
Vaargeul
Oostende Station
Mercator
Leopold III Laan
Ernest Feysplein
Perronstraat
Oesterbankstr.
Vruhavenstraat
Vooruitgang
Fregatstr.
Lijndraaierstraat
Fortunistr.
Brigantijnenstr.
Hazegrasstr.
Zinnialaan
Kazerne
Mercatorlaan
Veerplein
Nationaal Vlaanderenstraat
Spoorwegstraat
Bolwerkstr.
Vuurkruisenplein
Leopold II Laan
Vindictivelaan
Jachthaven
Aartshertoginnestr.
Jozef II
Kapellestraat
Hendrik Serruyslaan
Leopold IIxs Laan
Dr. L. Colensstr.
Stockholmstr.
Lepelstraat
Romestraat
Hospitalstr.
Ed. Cavellstraat
Kairostraat
Amsterdamstraat
Alfonse Pietersiaan
Antwerpenstr.
Gentstr.
Beernaertstraat
Spilliaertstraat
LEOPOLD PARK
Karel Janssenslaan
Ijzerstr.
Brusselstr.
Marie Joseplein
A. Buylstraat
St-Sebastiaanstr.
Kl. Weststr.
Madridstr.
Koningstraat I
Leopold plein
Kemmelbergstr.
Rogierlaan
Eufrosina
Warschaustr.
Parijsstr.
Albert I Promenade
Chaletstr.
Jules Peurquaetstr.
Peter Renoitstr.
Muscartstr.
E. Laponstr.
Prinses Stefanie Plein
Petit Paris Plein
Koninginnelaan
Leffingestraat
Brandarisskaai
Nathanaël
Astridlaan
Wellingtonstraat
Koningin
Velodroomstr.
Mariastr.
Rentenierstr.
Toekomststr.
Weeshuisstr.
Molenstr.
Steenweg
Grensstr.
Moerasstr.
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Sunday from 10am to 5pm. A **tourist information booth** at the rail station is open July to August daily from 9am to 1pm and 4 to 7:30pm.

GETTING AROUND Most points of interest in the town are sufficiently close together to reach on foot; or, you can rent a bike from the rail station for 9€ ($11) a day. **De Lijn** bus nos. 5, 6, and 39 go along the seafront to the west; if you want to get to points farther along the coast, in either direction, take the **Kusttram (Coast Tram)**—a streetcar that runs the full length of the Belgian coast—from a stop next to the rail station. For bus and tram information, call ✆ **070/22-02-00.** You can pick up a **taxi** from ranks at the rail station and Casino-Kursaal, or call **Taxibond** (✆ **059/70-27-27**).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

At the midpoint of Belgium's 70km (44-mile) North Sea coast, Ostend has been attracting seawater enthusiasts since 1784, when the town council allowed Englishman William Hesketh to set up a drinks kiosk on the beach. Later, he introduced mobile beach huts that were hauled into the water by horses. The long beach west of the harbor has stretches that are under lifeguard surveillance in summertime from 10:30am to 6:30pm, and some stretches where swimming is not permitted at any time. Look out for the signs that indicate both of these, and for the green, yellow, or red flags that tell you whether the sea conditions permit swimming.

Remember, this is the North Sea, not the Caribbean—not turquoise and sun-warmed, but gray and pretty darn cold. You can still swim, though, or join the ever-hopeful sun worshipers in search of the perfect tan.

Before World War II, the elevated **Albert I Promenade** and **Zeedijk** that run along the entire length of this 6km (4 miles) of beach were lined with elegant seaside villas, including holiday homes of European royalty. Wartime bombings and demolitions and postwar "improvements" destroyed many of these fine old houses. From the debris sprung character-free modern hotels and apartment buildings that critics have dubbed the Atlantic Wall (after Hitler's World War II coastal fortifications).

Museums & Attractions

Paintings by native sons James Ensor, Jan de Clerck, Constant Permeke, and Léon Spilliaert are featured in the **Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Fine Arts Museum)** ★★, Stedelijk Feest en Kultuurpaleis, Wapenplein (✆ **059/80-53-35**). It also displays works by the Belgian Impressionists. The museum is open Wednesday to Monday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults, 1€ ($1.25) for seniors, and free for children under 18.

Known by its initials, PMMK, the **Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst (Provincial Modern Art Museum)** ★, Romestraat 11 (✆ **059/50-81-18**), is set in a former department-store building in the town center. Its collection of more than 1,500 items, including paintings, sculpture, graphics, video, and film, gives a complete picture of modern art in Belgium from its beginnings up to the present. There are also frequent international exhibits, a children's museum, a workshop for youngsters, slide shows, and educational projects. The Art Shop sells art catalogs and functional-design art objects, and the Art Café is a pleasant setting for lunch. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 5€ ($6.25) for adults, 2.50€ ($3.15) for children ages 12 to 18, and free for children under 12.

The house where Anglo-Belgian artist James Ensor (1860–1949) lived between 1916 and his death has been transformed into a museum of his life, and

was restored in 2001 to its condition when his aunt kept a ground-floor shells-and-souvenir store here. Ensor's studio and lounge are on the second floor of the **James Ensorhuis**, Vlaanderenstraat 27 (✆ **059/80-53-35**), off Wapenplein. If you're familiar with his paintings, you'll recognize some of the furnishings and views from the windows, but only reproductions are displayed. Born in Ostend, the son of a Belgian mother and an English father, and little understood or appreciated during his lifetime for his fantastical, hallucinatory, and sexually ambiguous visions, the pre-expressionist painter is now considered a founder of modern art. His *The Entry of Christ into Brussels* (1889), first exhibited publicly in 1929 and now in California's Getty Museum, is his most famous work, but Ostend appreciates him just as much for his carnival masks inspired by the town's Dead Rat Ball. Ensor is buried in the churchyard at Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Duinenkerk (Our Lady of the Dunes Church), in Dorpstraat. The museum is open July to September, Wednesday to Monday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults, 1€ ($1.25) for seniors, and free for children under 18.

In a restored, surprisingly ordinary 19th-century town house that was the summer residence of King Léopold I, the **Oostends Historisch Museum De Plate (Ostend Historical Museum De Plate),** Langestraat 69 (✆ **059/80-53-35**), close to Wapenplein, has interesting displays of Neolithic and Roman artifacts excavated in the vicinity, in addition to exhibits depicting the native dress, folklore, and history of Ostend. There's a re-created fisherman's pub, a fisherman's home, and an old tobacco store. The Marine section deals with shipbuilding, fishing boats, and since the town has, until recently, been a port for the scheduled sea connection with England since 1846, the Dover-to-Ostend ferry. The museum is open Saturday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm; school holidays Wednesday to Monday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults, 1€ ($1.25) for seniors, and free for children under 14.

Since 1852 there's been a casino at the spot where **Casino-Kursaal Oostende**, Monacoplein (✆ **059/70-51-11**), stands, but the elegant original was unlucky enough to occupy a prime spot for a concrete bunker in Adolf Hitler's Atlantic Wall coast defenses. You could be forgiven for thinking the recently restored 1953 postmodern replacement isn't much of a visual improvement over the bunker. Still, the Kursaal has an opulent interior, with a concert hall, panoramic rooftop restaurant (open 5pm–midnight), dance hall, and, of course, gaming rooms, where you can play roulette, blackjack, and punto banco. The concert hall often is a venue for symphonic concerts, operettas, and ballet. The gaming rooms are open daily from 3pm to 7am. Admission is 4€ ($5) and a passport is required.

The only racetrack on the coast, a post–World War II successor to an 1856 original, the **Wellington Renbaan (Wellington Racetrack),** Koningin Astridlaan (✆ **059/80-60-55**), is just across from the seafront at the end of the Royal Arcades. There's a grass track for flat and hurdle racing and a lava track for the trotters. Call or visit the tourist information office for race times, May to September. Admission to grandstand seats is 12€ ($15) Monday to Friday, and 15€ ($19) on weekends and holidays; admission to the field opposite the grandstand is free.

Royal Ostend

Made fashionable by King Léopold I's decision to establish a holiday residence here in 1834, Ostend soon became a magnet for blue-blooded vacationers from Great Britain and the Continent. Remnants of this vanished glory are scattered around town.

Impressions

"You had some fun there, I suppose?" I put in, thinking of—well, of Ostend in August.
"Fun! A filthy hole I call it. . . . there was nothing to do on shore."
—*The Riddle of the Sands,* Erskine Childers, 1903

Ostend is now one of the most fashionable and cosmopolitan watering-places in Europe.
—Baedeker Belgium and Holland, 1905

Notable are two galleries on the waterfront Albert I Promenade built under the tutelage of the "architect king" Léopold II. The **Venetiaanse Gaanderijen (Venetian Galleries),** a 19th-century royal pavilion, is now a space for temporary exhibits. Beside it, the former Royal Villa houses the elegant Oostendse Compagnie hotel (see below). Further along the waterfront, the 400m-long (1,300 ft.) **Koninklijke Gaanderijen (Royal Galleries),** from 1906, served to shelter the king and his entourage from sun, wind, and rain during their promenades between the Royal Villa and the racetrack. In 1930 the Art Deco Thermae Palace was built at its center.

At the entrance to the Venetian Galleries, you can view a sympathetic **bronze sculpture** of Belgium's King Baudouin (1951–93), from 2000. In keeping with his image as the "people's king," Baudouin is depicted strolling in Ostend, wearing a raincoat. Compared to the resort's sculptures of King Léopold I (1831–65) and Léopold II (1865–1909), this shows how times have changed for the royal family. **Léopold I,** the first King of the Belgians, adopts a heroic nationalistic pose on Leopold I Plein, and **Léopold II,** a pompous imperialistic pose at the Venetian Galleries.

Marine Themes

Unsurprisingly, there's a lot of sea-related stuff to see and do in Ostend. Kids will likely appreciate a ramble through the **Driemaster *Mercator* (Three-Master *Mercator*),** Jachthaven Mercator (✆ **059/70-56-54**), moored in a dock facing the rail station. Formerly a Belgian merchant-marine training ship, the *Mercator,* a white-painted, three-masted schooner, is now a floating maritime museum. The ship is open: May, June, and September daily from 9am to noon and 1 to 6pm; July and August daily from 9am to 7pm; in other months the open hours are uncertain, and you should call ahead. Admission (audio guide included) is 3.50€ ($4.40) for adults, 2.75€ ($3.45) for seniors, 1.75€ ($2.20) for children ages 5 to 14, and free for children under 5.

Another interesting old seadog is the **IJslandvaarder *Amandine* (Iceland Fishing Boat *Amandine*).** Launched in 1961, the *Amandine* was the last Ostend trawler to work the rich fishing grounds off Iceland and now sits in a dry basin with a plastic "sea," as a memento of the history and traditions of Belgium's Icelandic fishery. You can tour the boat Monday from 2 to 7pm, and Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 7pm (closed for some weeks in Jan and Dec). Admission is 3€ ($3.75) for adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) for children ages 5 to 14, and free for children under 5.

Popular with children, though far from overwhelming, the **Noordzeeaquarium (North Sea Aquarium),** Visserskaai (✆ **059/32-16-69**), by the old fishing harbor, has a nice display of North Sea flora and fauna, including fish, mollusks, crustaceans, polyps, anemones, and interesting shell and seaweed collections.

The aquarium is open April to May, Monday to Friday from 10am to noon and 2 to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; June to September, Monday to Friday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm; October to March, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults, and 1€ ($1.25) for children ages 4 to 14, and free for children under 4.

You need to be up early to watch the stands at the **Vistrap (Fish Market),** on Visserskaai, being loaded up with North Sea fish fresh off the boats from the previous night's catch. Only fishing-boat owners are allowed to have a stand. Sole, plaice, whiting, cod, bream, brill, eels, and shrimps are the main species on view and for sale.

Organized Tours

Horse and Carriage tours (✆ **059/80-53-59**) depart from beside the harbor on Visserskaai. For guided walking tours, contact the tourist information office (see above).

WHERE TO STAY

Old Flanders ★★ This centrally located hotel has a cozy, country-house atmosphere. Guest rooms are modern and extensively furnished; each has a floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall wardrobe-and-shelves unit, on which the television stands. The bar has a cozy, antique feel, with a decor featuring a model sailboat and a model trawler and paintings of country scenes on the walls. The restaurant also has an elegant look, with a marble mantel surrounding the fireplace, a timbered ceiling, and brick arches.

Jozef II Straat 49, 8400 Oostende. ✆ **059/80-66-03.** Fax 059/80-16-95. 15 units. 68€–84€ ($85–$105) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ ($10). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian); bar; babysitting. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

Oostendse Compagnie ★★★ One of the best hotels on the seacoast, this excellent small hotel in a former royal villa retains an atmosphere of "home," though admittedly it's home on a grand scale. A pretty terrace and garden face the sea; floor-length windows with the same view line the drawing room; and the dining room is known for its excellent kitchen. The guest rooms are beautifully furnished, much like those in a private home, and the two suites provide such perfect comfort and beauty that they'll tempt you to settle in for a long spell. This is a very popular place, so book as far ahead as possible. The French—with a dash of Asian influence—Au Vigneron restaurant has a sea view and is very popular locally.

Koningstraat 79, 8400 Oostende (on the beachfront near the casino; entrance at rear). ✆ **059/70-48-16.** Fax 059/80-53-16. 15 units. 125€–160€ ($156–$200) double; 185€–245€ ($231–$306) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Closed Oct and Mar 1–15. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); lounge; bar; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

David Dewaele ★★ SEAFOOD/FRENCH Family-owned and with a high local reputation, Dewaele occupies a prime position on Ostend's "Fisherman's Wharf." Timber-framed, it looks vaguely like an old-style ship's cabin on the outside and a marine theme is maintained in the bright, elegant interior, with a decor of seashells, sailing-ship photographs, and other nautical tokens. Chef David has worked for the highly regarded seafood restaurants De Karmeliet in Bruges and Sea Grill in Brussels. Most fish comes fresh from the North Sea and from the market across the street, with the more exotic red mullet and sea bass coming in from France. If you have breath enough, you could ask for *tongfilets*

met tomatenfonds en broodkruim van sjalotten (sole filets on a base of tomato and crusted shallots). You also can choose meat menu dishes like *pigeon de Bresse.*

Visserskaai 39 (opposite Fish Market). ✆ **059/70-42-26.** Main courses 17€–35€ ($21–$44); fixed-price menus 27€–50€ ($34–$63). AE, DC, MC, V. July–Aug daily noon–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm; Sept–June Tues–Sun noon–3pm and 6:30–10:30pm.

James Taverne ★★ *Finds* TRADITIONAL FLEMISH When Belgium's ace chefs, like Pierre Wynants from Brussels's Comme Chez Soi, wash up (so to speak) in Ostend, chances are you'll find them at this Old Flemish tavern in an Art Deco shopping gallery, tucking into a plate of two homemade *garnaalkroketten* (shrimp croquettes), accompanied by two slices of lemon and a sprig of crisply fried parsley, washed down with a glass of local Wieze beer. The Knaeps family has been serving these and other traditional Flemish dishes since 1954 and has a Zen-like faith in the humble North Sea shrimp, fished overnight, cooked in seawater on the boat, and eaten within the day on the seacoast. They taste heavenly. The James's cozy and friendly atmosphere, along with a decor of marine paintings, antiques, and old photographs of both James Ensor and Ostend, are equally memorable.

James Ensor Galerij 34 (off Vlaanderenstraat). ✆ **059/705245.** Main courses 9.50€–18€ ($12–$22). Wed–Mon 10am–10pm.

AFTER DARK

Should you want no more than a quiet drink when the sun goes down, visit the Old Flemish–style **Café Rubens,** Visserskaai 44 (✆ **059/80-85-08**), or one of the cafes with sidewalk terraces around Wapenplein. For late-night dance clubs, cabarets, and bars, head for Langestraat, which runs east from Monacoplein, in front of the Casino-Kursaal. And there's the year-round Casino itself, of course (see above), and its dance hall and clubs that attract top performers during the summer months. Or, just take the kids for an ice cream at **George's Tearoom,** Adolf Buylstraat 15 (✆ **059/70-29-25**).

YPRES ★

45km (28 miles) SW of Bruges

With a spare day available, you can combine a visit to Bruges with a visit to Ypres (*Ieper* in Dutch), famous for its associations with World War I. Set among the low, gentle slopes of the West Flanders *Heuvelland* (Hill Country), the handsome small town owed its early prosperity to a textile industry that peaked in the 13th century. Over the centuries, it was victimized by one war after another and became a ghost of its former self. By far the most devastating was World War I (1914–18)—the "war to end all wars"—when hardly a brick was left standing after 4 years of violent bombardments.

Many visitors come to Ypres (pronounced *Ee*-pruh, or *Ee*-puhr in Dutch) to pay homage to those who fell on the surrounding battlefields and rest peacefully buried in the many military cemeteries that lie on the green breast of the Heuvelland. Homage could also be paid to the determined citizens who have rebuilt, brick by brick, the most important of the town's medieval buildings exactly as they were, carefully following original plans still in existence. This accounts for the pristine look of venerable monuments, in place of the moldering stonework you might expect.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains depart hourly from Bruges. Look out for the Dutch name IEPER written on the station name board. The trip takes around 1 hour and you may need to change trains at Kortrijk.

Going by bus from Bruges is a bad option unless you have time to take in every haystack and hamlet along the way.

By car from Bruges take A17/E403 south to the Kortrijk interchange, then A19 west; from the coast at De Panne take N8 south.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Ieper,** Lakenhalle, Grote Markt, 8900 Ieper (✆ **057/23-92-00;** fax 057/22-85-89; www.ieper.be), is open April to September, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm and Sunday from 10am to 6pm; October to March, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm and Sunday from 10am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND Sights in the town are easily reached on foot, though if you are arriving by train, you can save time by taking a **De Lijn** (✆ **070/22-02-00**) bus to the Grote Markt from the bus station adjoining the rail station. Taxis often are available at the rail station, or call **Taxi Leo** (✆ **057/20-04-13**). You can rent bikes at the station for 9€ ($11) daily.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The gabled guild houses and patrician mansions around the Grote Markt are occupied now mostly by restaurants, cafes, and hotels. At the western end of this main central square, Ypres's medieval wealth is reflected in its extravagant Gothic **Lakenhalle (Cloth Hall)** ★★. The original, constructed between 1250 and 1304 along the Ieperlee river, which has long since been banished underground, was blown to bits between 1914 and 1918 and rebuilt with painstaking care in subsequent decades, though the work wasn't finished until 1967. Gilded statues adorn the roof, and a statue of Our Lady of Thuyne, the patron of Ypres, stands over the main entrance, the Donkerpoort. Inside, the spacious ground-floor halls where wool and cloth were once sold are now used for exhibits.

The upper-floor storage space houses the superb **In Flanders Fields Museum** ★★ (✆ **057/22-85-84;** www.inflandersfields.be). "War is hell" is the clear message of this superb interactive museum. You "experience" the Great War through the eyes of ordinary soldiers and civilians, and get an idea of the events of those 4 dreadful years. It is as much a peace museum as a war museum—it could scarcely be otherwise, considering the awesome slaughter on all sides that took place on the battlefields around the town. The museum, which won the 2000 Museum Award of the Council of Europe for its innovative presentation, is open April to September daily from 10am to 6pm; October to March, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm (closed for 3 weeks after

Moments Carnival Capers

Every 3 years on the second Sunday in May, Ypres celebrates the colorful and ancient **Kattestoet (Festival of the Cats)** ★★ pageant, when hundreds of cats are thrown from the Belfry to the crowds of people down below—outraged cat lovers can simmer down; until 1870, live cats were thrown, but since then the flying felines have been fluffy toys. The custom originated centuries ago when the Lakenhalle attracted thousands of mice, and cats by the hundreds were imported to eliminate them. Once the cloth was sold, the cats themselves became a problem. After due consideration, officials came up with the brilliant solution of flinging them from the Belfry. That tradition evolved into the revelry of today's lively carnival and procession. The next Kattestoet is in 2006.

New Year's). Admission is 7.50€ ($9.40) for adults, 3.50€ ($4.40) for children ages 7 to 15, and free for children under 7. The same ticket is good also for admission to Ypres's Municipal Museum, Godshuis Belle Museum, and Municipal Museum of Education (see below for details of the first two of these).

From the center of the Lakenhalle, the **Belfort (Belfry),** which has four corner turrets and a spire and encloses a 49-bell carillon, soars 70m (228 ft.). You get a fine view over the town from here, provided you're willing and able to climb 264 interior steps to the upper gallery. Carillon concerts chime out on Saturday from 11am to noon and Sunday from 4 to 5pm.

A Flemish Renaissance extension at the eastern end of the Cloth Hall, the arcaded Nieuwerck from 1619 to 1624, is Ypres's **Stadhuis (Town Hall).** You can visit the council chamber and view its fine stained-glass window Monday to Friday from 8:30 to 11:45am when the council is not in session. Admission is free.

The graceful spire of the 13th-century Gothic **Sint-Martenskathedraal (St. Martin's Cathedral)** in Sint-Maartensplein is a town landmark. Inside is the tomb of the Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), a bishop of Ypres whose doctrine of predestination, called Jansenism, rocked the Catholic church and was condemned as heretical by the pope in 1642. Britain's armed forces donated the superb stained-glass rose window in honor of Belgium's King Albert I, the World War I "soldier king." Note the eight alabaster statues on the baptistery chapel screen. The cathedral is open to visitors daily from 8am to 8pm, except during services when it's open only to worshipers. Admission is free.

Behind St Martin's the Celtic cross **Munster Memorial** honors Irish soldiers killed in World War I. Across the way British and Commonwealth veterans made of the Anglican **St George's Memorial Church,** Elverdingsestraat (✆ **057/21-56-85**), from 1929, a shrine to the memory of their fallen comrades. Wall-mounted banners and pew kneelers decorated with colorful corps and regimental badges add an almost festive air to what might otherwise be a somber scene. The church is open daily from 9:30am to dusk (4pm in winter). Admission is free.

At Meensepoort (Menen Gate), on the famous marble arch of the **Missing Memorial** ★, you can read the names of 54,896 British troops who fell around Ypres between 1914 and August 15, 1917, and who have no known grave. Every evening at 8 o'clock, traffic through the gate is stopped while Ypres firefighters in dress uniform sound the plaintive notes of *The Last Post* on silver bugles donated by the British Legion in a brief but moving ceremony that dates from 1928. Adjacent to this, the **Australian Memorial** honors the more than 43,000 Aussies killed in the Ypres salient.

The impressive 17th-century **ramparts** designed by the French military engineer Vauban, fronted by a moat that once surrounded the town, are among the few structures not demolished during World War I. You can reach them via stairs at the Menen Gate and walk around a pleasant park to Rijselsepoort (Lille Gate) to visit the **Ramparts Cemetery,** a British war cemetery with a beautiful green lawn and just 193 headstones. If you can't get to the cemeteries outside town, you can at least pay your respects at this one—the others are not that much different, only larger. At the side of Rijselsepoort at Rijselsestraat 204 is a **timber house** from 1575; streets hereabouts are lined with reconstructed 17th-century facades.

The fine-arts **Merghelynck Museum,** Arthur Merghelynckstraat 2A (✆ **057/22-85-84**), in a rococo and neoclassical manor house from 1744, is furnished with Louis XV and XVI antiques. Its elegant rooms house a collection of silverware and Chinese and Japanese porcelain. Even the coach house is pressed into service, to exhibit items associated with the town's medieval cloth trade. A highlight of the

collection is a beautiful painting, *The Vanity of Riches* (ca. 1637–38), attributed tentatively in part to Rubens. The museum is open by appointment only, Monday to Saturday from 10am to noon and from 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2.50€ ($3.15) for adults, 1.25€ ($1.55) for children ages 7 to 15, and free for children under 7.

The **Godshuis Belle Museum,** Rijselsestraat 38 (✆ **057/22-85-84**), in an almshouse from 1276, counts among its treasures the *Virgin and Child* by the anonymous Master of 1420. Other exhibits include religious paintings from the 16th to the 19th centuries, by artists such as Nicolaas Van de Velde and Gilles Lamoot. In addition, there is pewter, lace, and furniture. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to noon and 2 to 6pm. Admission is 2.50€ ($3.15) for adults and free for children under 15.

In the Sint-Jan Godshuis, a rebuilt almshouse from 1270, the **Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum)** ★, Ieperleestraat 31 (✆ **057/22-85-82**), recounts the town's history through paintings, antique maps, and sculpture. A fine-arts section has sculpture, silverware, porcelain, and more. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm; November to March, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 5pm. Admission is 2.50€ ($3.15) for adults, 1.25€ ($1.55) for children ages 7 to 15, and free for children under 7.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

In the gently rolling countryside around Ypres, you can visit no fewer than 185 tranquil and often beautiful World War I military cemeteries. To visitors from Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Ypres is a place of pilgrimage, just as the Battle of the Bulge memorials in the Ardennes are places of pilgrimage to many Americans. Like the Somme and Verdun in France, Ypres—"Wipers," as the Tommies called it—was one of the slaughterhouses on the Western Front. Between 1914 and 1918, in the few square miles of the Ypres Salient, 250,000 soldiers from Britain and its empire, France, and Belgium were killed, along with an equal number of Germans; the tally of wounded on all sides reached 1,200,000.

In addition to the daily attrition of 4 years of trench warfare, four great battles were fought in the salient. During the Second Ypres, in 1915, Canadian troops became the first-ever victims of chemical warfare, when a cloud of deadly green chlorine gas drifted over no man's land from the German lines. The greatest battle was the 6-month-long Third Ypres, in 1917, better known as the Battle of Passchendaele after the village east of Ypres that was its focus; its Flemish name is Passendale and it was called "Passiondale" by the British and Commonwealth troops, who sustained 400,000 casualties to capture the village.

Battlefield Tours

Local companies **Flanders Battlefield Tour** (✆ **057/36-04-60**) and **Salient Tours** (✆ **0475/91-02-23**) run minibus tours of the battlefields and memorials, departing from the Grote Markt or the Menen Gate and ranging from 2 hours to half a day. The tourist office can sell you a package for the In Flanders Fields Route, a self-guided tour of 80km (50 miles) on signposted roads, that covers all the main sights.

For a 1- to 2-hour self-guided tour by car, head out of town through the Menen Gate and take N8 to Canadalaan, close to Bellewaerde Park, at the end of which is a preserved stretch of trenches complete with shell holes and shattered trees in **Sanctuary Wood.** Amazingly, there is almost no other remaining

Tips Harvest of Death

Farmers plowing their fields regularly turn up some of the many thousands of unexploded shells that still lie under the ground hereabouts, and leave them by the roadside for Belgian army engineers to remove. These munitions are unstable and liable to explode, so you should not touch them.

sign of that vast network of muddy, waterlogged trenches—the once tortured landscape has been reclaimed by agriculture and nature. Nearby stands the **Canadian Monument** on **Hill 62.**

From here, return to N8. Then, take N332 and N303 through Zonnebeke in the direction of Passendale to the **Tyne Cot Commonwealth Military Cemetery** and its 12,000 graves surmounted by a Cross of Remembrance in white Portland stone.

Finally, to be evenhanded, head west from Zonnebeke to the far side of Langemark and the 44,000 graves at the **Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof (German Military Cemetery).** N313 from Langemark takes you straight back into Ypres.

WHERE TO STAY

Old Tom This small, family-owned hotel has a prime location in the center of town and reasonable rates. With only nine rooms, it fills up fast in summer. The building has plenty of antique style and the guest rooms are comfortable and nicely, if plainly, furnished. A cafe-restaurant on the first floor has an outdoor terrace and serves regional specialties, like eel, in addition to common Flemish menu dishes.

Grote Markt 8, 8900 Ieper. ✆ **057/20-15-41.** Fax 057/21-91-20. www.oldtom.be. 9 units. 65€ ($81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Flemish); bar. *In room:* TV.

Regina This small, neo-Gothic-style hotel seems like a page from the town's rich history and combines this with modern guest rooms and a popular restaurant that serves fine regional cuisine. The guest rooms are stylishly furnished and equipped, and some have a view of the Lakenhalle and the Grote Markt fountain.

Grote Markt 45, 8900 Ieper. ✆ **057/21-88-88.** Fax 057/21-90-20. www.hotelregina.be. 17 units. 80€–110€ ($100–$138) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Flemish); bar. *In room:* TV, minibar.

WHERE TO DINE

De Waterpoort FLEMISH You'll find this stylish restaurant to be quite different from the traditional type of eatery that's common in Ypres. It's located in the north of town beyond the moat and is decorated in a spare, modern style. De Waterpoort has a light, open dining room and a garden with a nice alfresco terrace and a play area for children. The menu takes in seafood and updated versions of Flemish dishes, some of them cooked on an open grill, as well as a fine Australian entrecôte steak and some vegetarian options.

43 Brugseweg (6 blocks north of Grote Markt on Diksmuidestraat and Arthur Stoffelstraat). ✆ **057/20-54-52.** Main courses 8€–16€ ($10–$20); *menu classico* 25€ ($31). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Sat and Mon–Tues noon–3pm; Thurs–Tues 6–10pm.

Ter Posterie FLEMISH This traditional cafe-restaurant, down a narrow alleyway off Arthur Merghelynckstraat, serves basic Flemish fare. Look out for

mussels in season, sole, and steak with french fries. These are accompanied by no less than 250 different Belgian beers, including the local—and expensive—Poperings Hommelbier and all six of Belgium's Trappist beers, among them Westmalle Dubbel, the only Trappist beer that's on tap. You can dine and drink outdoors in the courtyard when the weather's fine. The plainly furnished interior is convivial when it's busy but can seem somewhat gloomy out of season.

Rijselsestraat 57 (off Grote Markt). ✆ **057/20-05-80.** Main courses 8€–20€ ($10–$25). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 11am–2am.

6

Ghent

Ghent (Gent), the capital town of Oost-Vlaanderen (East Flanders) province, is often considered a poor relation of Bruges in tourism terms, with historical monuments and townscapes that are not quite as pretty as those in its sister city to the north, and therefore only to be visited if there is time after seeing Bruges. From a tourist's point of view, there is some truth in this—but not too much. Life moves faster in Ghent, an important port and industrial center, and it compensates for its less precious appearance with a vigorous social and cultural scene.

This magnificent old city at the confluence of the Leie (Lys) and Scheldt (Schelde) rivers, 48km (30 miles) northwest of Brussels and 46km (28 miles) southeast of Bruges, has always been a pivotal point for Flanders. For a time during the Middle Ages, this was one of the richest cities in Europe north of the Alps. Ghent was the seat of the counts of Flanders, who built their great castle here in 1180, but local fortifications predate their reign, going back to the 900s.

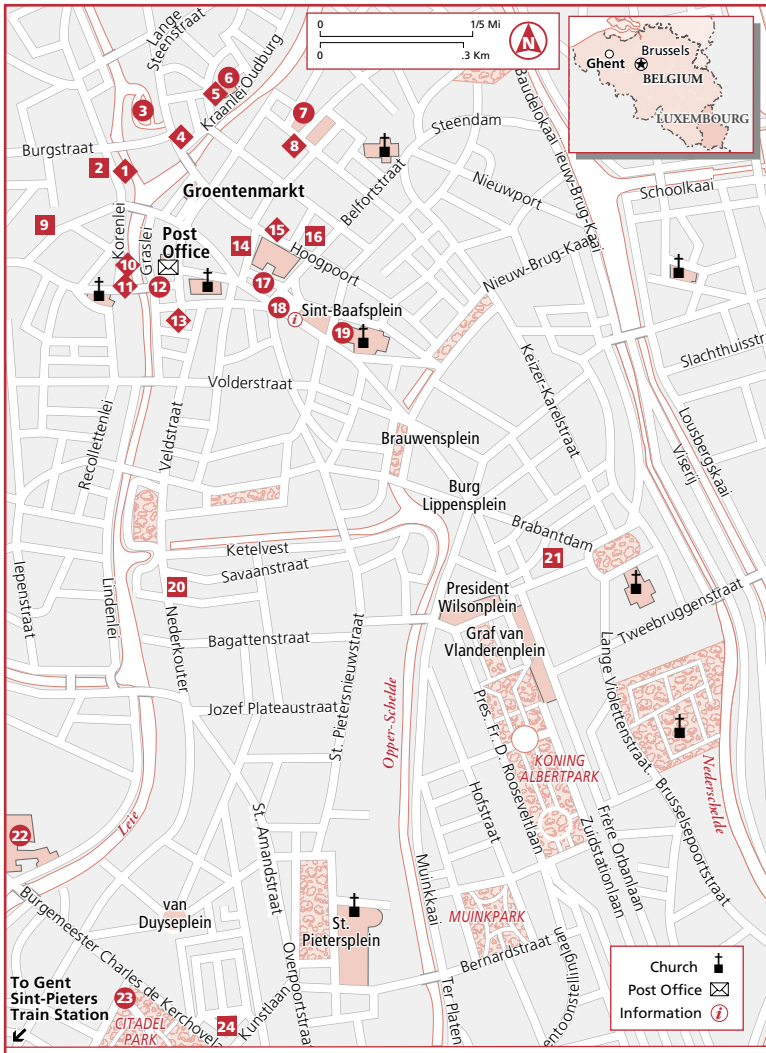
After a long history of economic ups and downs, Ghent today (pop. 220,000) has emerged once more as a major industrial center. Its medieval treasures are preserved, not as dry, showcase relics, but as living parts of the city. And to lighten what could be the overpowering grayness of industrialization, there are flowers everywhere, creating oases of color as a constant reminder that this is also the heart of a

Rebel Stands

Hands-on rule began very early on in Ghent, and the common people—skilled weavers and craftsmen—never learned to live with it. During the Middle Ages, Ghent became as great a manufacturing center as Bruges was a trading center, but it never lacked for turmoil. The artisans rebelled not only against an exploitative nobility but even fought amongst themselves, guild against guild. Over the centuries the people of Ghent clashed with the counts of Flanders, the counts of Burgundy, the king of France, the king of Spain, their rivals in Bruges, and . . . well, anyone else who tried to take power over the town.

The fact that they so seldom prevailed for any length of time did not deter them in the least: With each new conquest, they'd settle down for a spell, begin to seethe with indignation, finally reach a boiling point, and then take to the warpath all over again. Small wonder, then, that in 1815 it was Maurice de Broglie, a bishop of Ghent, who sparked the fire of indignation against the rule of Dutch Protestants, a fire that in 1830 would burst into the flame of national independence for Belgium.

Ghent



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prosperous horticultural industry. In short, Ghent is a busy, lively city, whose reminders of the past are as comfortable in the present as a pair of well-broken-in shoes.

1 Orientation

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport is the main airport for Ghent (see "Getting There" in chapter 2). From the airport, the best way to get to Ghent is by train, via Brussels.

BY TRAIN

Trains arrive every hour or so from Brussels, Antwerp, and Bruges. Journey time is about 30 minutes from all three cities. From Paris, you can take the Thalys high-speed trains through Brussels direct to Ghent, or the slower and cheaper International trains, changing in Brussels. From Amsterdam, you can go via Antwerp or Brussels, either on the Thalys or the normal International and Inter-City trains.

The city is called Ghent in English (and *Gand* in French), but look out for its Flemish name, GENT, written on the rail station name boards. Ghent's main rail station, **Gent Sint-Pieters** (✆ **09/222-44-44**), is on Koningin Maria-Hendrikaplein, about 1.6km (1 mile) south of town. Unless you need to count every euro, don't walk to the center; it's a dull route, even though it might take you only around 20 minutes. Instead, from outside the station, take a taxi, or, from under the bridge to your left when you exit the station, tram no. 1, 10, 11, or 12, and get out at Korenmarkt. Save your shoe leather and energy for sightseeing in the oldest part of town.

BY BUS

Ghent's main **bus station** adjoins the Sint-Pieters rail station (see above). For schedule and fare information, call ✆ **070/22-02-00** between 6am and 9pm. **Eurolines** operates a daily service from London's Victoria Coach Station—via the Dover-Calais (France) ferry or the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle train—to Brussels, stopping at Ghent. The city can also be reached from all over Britain and Europe on the Eurolines network, via London or Brussels. For schedule and fare information, contact Eurolines at ✆ **08705/808080** in Britain, or ✆ **02/274-13-50** in Belgium.

BY CAR

Ghent is 50km (31 miles) northwest of Brussels and 51km (32 miles) southeast of Bruges, both on A10/E40; it's 45km (28 miles) southwest of Antwerp on A14/E17.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Ghent's main tourist office, **Dienst Toerisme Gent,** Predikherenlei 2, 9000 Gent (✆ **09/225-36-41;** fax 09/225-62-88; www.gent.be), is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 4:30pm. More convenient for personal visits, the **Infokantoor (Inquiry Desk)** in the Belfry cellar, Botermarkt 17A, 9000 Gent (✆ **09/266-52-32;** fax 09/224-15-55; www.gent.be), is open April to October daily from 9:30am to 6:30pm, and November to March daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm.

Impressions

The Ley and the Scheld meeting in this vast Citty divide it into 26 Ilands which are united togethere by many bridges somewhat resembling Venice.

—English diarist John Evelyn, 1641

CITY LAYOUT

Korenmarkt lies at the center *(Centrum)* of the city. Most of the city's important sights—including the Town Hall, Saint Bavo's Cathedral, and the Belfry—lie within a half mile of this central square. The **Leie River** winds through the center to connect with the Scheldt River and a network of canals that lead to the busy port area. **Citadel Park,** location of the Fine Arts Museum, is near Sint-Pieters Station. **Patershol** (which means the cave—or hole—in which monks lived a hermit's existence) is an ancient enclave not far from the Castle of the Counts. The place is fast becoming a gastronomic center, as more and more small restaurants move into renovated old buildings in the area.

GETTING AROUND

Ghent has an excellent **tram** and **bus** network (✆ **070/22-02-00**), with many lines converging at Korenmarkt and Sint-Pieters railway station. Walking is the best way to view the center. Farther out, you're better off using public transportation, particularly the trams. Most lines travel along Nederkouter and continue to Korenmarkt.

For a taxi, call **V-Tax** (✆ **09/225-25-25**).

SPECIAL EVENTS

During 10 days around July 21, plunge into the swirl of Belgium's greatest extended street party, the **Gentse Feesten** (**Ghent Festivities;** ✆ **092/269-46-00**), a time of free music, from classical through Tin Pan Alley to alternative rock and the latest disco sounds, along with dance, street theater and performance art, puppet shows, a street fair, special museum exhibits, and generally riotous fun and games in the heart of the city.

The colorful **Begonia Festival** takes place the last weekend in August.

FAST FACTS: Ghent

American Express There is no office in Ghent. The nearest is in Brussels (see "Fast Facts: Brussels" in chapter 3).

Area Code Ghent's telephone area code is **09.** You need to dial **09** both inside Ghent and from elsewhere in Belgium. Dial just **9** (without the initial 0) if you're phoning Ghent from outside Belgium.

Business Hours **Banks** are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30 or 5pm. Open hours for **offices** are Monday to Friday from 9 or 10am to 4 or 5pm. Most **stores** are open Monday to Saturday from 9 or 10am to 6 or 7pm; some stay open on Friday until 8 or 9pm.

Car Rental **Avis,** Kortrijksesteenweg 676 (✆ **09/222-00-53**); **Hertz,** Coupure 707 (✆ **09/224-04-06**); **Europcar,** Einde Were 1 (✆ **09/235-87-11**).

Currency Exchange The tourist office (see "Visitor Information" above) is a good place to change money and traveler's checks, as are banks. ATMs, identified by MISTER CASH and BANCONTACT signs, on Korenmarkt and at numerous other points in the city center, can be accessed by credit cards, bank cards, and charge cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks.

Emergencies For police assistance, call ✆ **101.** For an ambulance or the fire department, call ✆ **100.**

Hospital For medical assistance, go to the **Sint-Lucasziekenhuis,** Groenebriel 1 (✆ **09/224-61-11**).

Newspapers & Magazines The ***Bulletin,*** Belgium's Brussels-based weekly magazine in English, also covers Ghent, though not in as much depth as it does the capital. See also "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Police (Politie) In an emergency, call ✆ **101.** In nonurgent situations, go to the **Central Police Station,** Belfortstraat 4 (✆ **09/266-61-30**).

Post Office The main post office is at Lange Kruisstraat 55 (✆ **09/269-27-50**), open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to noon.

Restrooms See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2. Should you have a toilet emergency in the center of Ghent, the very best address to find relief is at the Sofitel Gent Belfort hotel, on Hoogpoort (see "Where to Stay" below).

Safety Crime is not much of a problem in Ghent. The city is safe and there are no areas you need to fear going into. That said, it can't hurt to take routine precautions against pickpocketing and other types of theft.

Tipping See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Telephones See "Area Code" above and "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, and Métro services, call ✆ **070/22-02-00.**

2 Where to Stay

Because of its proximity to both Brussels and Bruges, Ghent is often regarded by tourists as a day-trip destination, but several good hotels in the center make it a convenient sightseeing base. However, the city has fewer hotels than might be expected, and those in the center are often full at peak times, so try to book in advance.

The tourist office can make hotel reservations for a returnable deposit.

EXPENSIVE

Novotel Gent Centrum ★★ Designed to fit, more or less, into its antique surroundings (and incorporating bits and pieces of the foundations of various 14th-century buildings into its structure), this modern hotel has an enviable position near the Town Hall, within easy reach of all the city's top sights. A chain hotel itself, it nevertheless shares more than a few of the modern advantages of the Sofitel (see below), without causing anything like the same pocketbook damage. Nevertheless, for all the apparent bows to heritage, this is still not the place to be for traditional Ghent style. The rooms—many of which will be undergoing renovation in 2005—are furnished in a bright, efficient style. The facilities, which are all you'd expect from a good hotel, include light public rooms and a courtyard garden terrace.

Goudenleeuwplein 5 (facing the Belfry and Cloth Hall), 9000 Gent. ✆ **800/221-4542** or 09/224-22-30. Fax 09/224-32-95. www.novotel.com. 117 units. 100€–144€ ($125–$180) double; 170€ ($213) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ ($16). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar; outdoor pool; health club; sauna; 24-hr. room service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Sofitel Gent Belfort ★ If you like to experience your historic towns in the close company of modernity and comfort, the Sofitel might well be the place for you. The chain's often bland house style is mitigated in this instance by its having been designed to fit at least partly into its venerable surroundings, and that it sits atop medieval cellars and foundations. Add to this an ideal location just across the road from the Town Hall, within easy distance of the city's premier tourist attractions. The hotel is otherwise bright and modern and the rooms have most of the level of style and comforts expected by a demanding international clientele. Belgian specialties and international dishes are served in the Van Artevelde Brasserie, and outside on the patio in good weather; drinks are served in the cellar bar. A cluster of 45 new rooms opened in late 2004.

Hoogpoort 63, 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/233-33-31.** Fax 09/233-11-02. www.sofitel.com. 172 units. 245€–320€ ($306–$400) double; 415€ ($519) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 13€ ($16). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Belgian/international); bar; health club; concierge; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Erasmus ★★ Each room is different in this converted 16th-century house, and all are plush, furnished with antiques and knickknacks. Rooms have high oak-beam ceilings, and bathrooms are modern. Some rooms have leaded-glass windows, some overlook a carefully manicured inner garden, and some have elaborate marble fireplaces. Breakfast is served in an impressive room that would have pleased the counts of Flanders.

Poel 25, 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/224-21-95.** Fax 09/233-42-41. hotel.erasmus@proximedia.be. 11 units. 99€–130€ ($124–$163) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. **Amenities:** Bar. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Gravensteen ★★ You enter this lovely mansion, built in 1865 as the home of a Ghent textile baron, through the old carriageway (made up of ornamented pillars and an impressive wall niche occupied by a marble statue), which sets the tone for what you find inside. The elegant, high-ceilinged parlor is a sophisticated blend of pastels, gracious modern furnishings, and antiques, with a small bar tucked into one corner. The rooms are attractive and comfortably furnished. Those in front look out on the moated castle, while those to the back have city views. There's a top-floor lookout, with windows offering magnificent views of the city. Afternoon tea is available. There's no dining room, but plenty of good restaurants are within easy walking distance.

Jan Breydelstraat 35 (a short walk from Graslei and the Castle of the Counts), 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/225-11-50.** Fax 09/225-18-50. www.gravensteen.be. 45 units. 135€–145€ ($169–$181) double; 197€ ($246) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ ($10). **Amenities:** Bar; laundry service. *In room:* A/C in some rooms, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Ibis Gent Centrum Opera The rooms in this modern hotel are bright and comfortably furnished. There's a nice bar, and though there's no restaurant on the premises, several good eateries are nearby. The Ibis basically offers good accommodations at moderate rates, in a location between the city center and the railway station. A major renovation program has been completed.

Nederkouter 24–26, 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/225-07-07.** Fax 09/223-59-07. www.ibishotel.com. 134 units. 87€–100€ ($109–$125) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ ($10). **Amenities:** Bar; laundry service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

Adoma The facilities and atmosphere at this renovated hotel have taken a big leap forward, yet the rates remain reasonable. Rooms are spacious and brightly decorated, with modern furnishings. You'll find staying here to be a comfortable, if not luxurious, experience.

Sint-Denijslaan 19 (behind Sint-Pieters rail station), 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/222-65-50.** Fax 09/245-09-37. www.hotel-adoma.be. 15 units. 58€–100€ ($73–$125) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV.

Eden ★ Not far from the city center, this is a nice hotel in its price range. The decor is pleasantly modern, and each room has a tapestry on the wall. Although most bathrooms are small, each has at least a toilet and shower, and some rooms have full bathrooms.

Zuidstationstraat 24, 9000 Gent. ✆ **09/223-51-51.** Fax 09/233-34-57. 28 units. 70€–95€ ($88–$119) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV.

3 Where to Dine

In keeping with the city's tradition as a center of Flemish culture, many of Ghent's restaurants keep the region's culinary traditions alive and well, in dishes such as the thick, creamy *waterzooï op Gentse wijze* (a fish or chicken soup that borders on being a stew), and *lapin à la flamande* (rabbit with beer, vinegar, and currant juice), or if it's the right season, asparagus from the Mechelen area. Prices are generally well below those in Brussels. The helpful, free *Hotels and Restaurants* booklet published by the tourist office lists the more prominent restaurants in all price brackets.

EXPENSIVE

Graaf van Egmond ★ FLEMISH In the marvelous setting of a centuries-old town house on the Leie River, this traditional restaurant is a dazzling visual spectacle that's matched by the culinary one. The wide-ranging menu features hearty portions of fish and meat dishes. Flemish specialties include *paling in 't groen* (eel with green sauce), chicken *waterzooï* (chicken stew), *carbonnade flamande* (beef stew), and asparagus *à la flamande.* Try to get a window seat, which affords a spectacular view of the towers of Ghent.

Sint-Michielsplein 21 (at Graslei). ✆ **09/225-07-27.** www.graafvanegmond.be. Main courses 16€–27€ ($20–$34); fixed-price menu 24€ ($30). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–11pm.

Jan Breydel ★★ SEAFOOD/FLEMISH High honors go to this exquisite restaurant on a quaint street near the Castle of the Counts. Its interior is a garden delight of greenery, white napery, and light woods. Proprietors Louis and Pat Hellebaut see to it that dishes issued from their kitchen are as light as the setting, with delicate sauces and seasonings enhancing fresh ingredients. Seafood and regional specialties like the traditional Ghent souplike fish stew *waterzooï* are all superb. In summertime you can dine outdoors on a terrace beside the confluence of the Leie River and the Lieve canal, and next to a pretty little garden called Appelbrug Parkje.

Jan Breydelstraat 10 (opposite Design Museum Gent). ✆ **09/225-62-87.** Main courses 18€–32€ ($22–$39); fixed-price menus 31€–48€ ($39–$60). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–2pm; Mon–Sat 7–10pm.

MODERATE

Auberge De Fonteyne ★ FLEMISH/MUSSELS It might seem difficult for the food quality to equal the extravagant good looks of the restored Art Deco interior of this restaurant, but it comes pretty close. *Waterzooï op Gentse wijze* (a

freshwater-fish stew originating in Ghent) is a favorite, and so are heaps of the big Zeeland mussels that Belgium loses its collective cool over. The Renaissance-style building from 1539 was the meeting place of De Fonteyne, a local rhetorical society.

Gouden Leeuwplein 7. ✆ **09/224-24-54.** Main courses 15€–18€ ($19–$23); fixed-price menus 25€–40€ ($31–$50). MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 6pm–midnight; Sat–Sun noon–2pm.

Brasserie Pakhuis ★★ FLEMISH/CONTINENTAL In a town where the Middle Ages are *big,* this see-and-be-seen hangout is almost modern and certainly hip. In a vast, beautifully restored 19th-century warehouse down a narrow lane, it's replete with painted cast-iron pillars, green pipes and tubing, ceiling fans, track lighting, soaring wrought-iron balconies, and oak and marble tables with specially designed table settings, and has a granite mosaic floor. Although maybe too conscious of its own sense of style, Pakhuis (which means "warehouse" in Dutch) is all stocked up in matters of taste. The oyster and seafood platters are notable, and you won't go wrong with meat-based offerings like baked ham in a mustard sauce, or Flemish favorites like *waterzooï* and *garnaalkroketten* (shrimp croquettes). Outside of lunch and dinner times, you can join the local smart-set for afternoon tea or for a late-night drink at the curving oak-and-riveted-copper bar.

Schuurkenstraat 4 (off Veldstraat). ✆ **09/223-55-55.** www.pakhuis.be. Main courses 11€–20€ ($14–$25); fixed-price menus 23€–28€ ($28–$34). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight.

Crypte ★ FLEMISH Housed in what is allegedly Belgium's oldest crypt, dating back to the 12th century, this restaurant radiates an authentic Flemish atmosphere and serves some superbly prepared food to match. The favorite dish is roast goose—every second table orders it. Other dishes range from T-bone steak to grilled pike. The wine list is extensive too.

Korenlei 24. ✆ **09/233-06-95.** www.crypte.be. Main courses 9.50€–20€ ($12–$24); fixed-price menu 25€ ($31). AE, MC, V. Thurs–Mon 11am–3pm and 6pm–midnight.

Keizershof ★★ BELGIAN/CONTINENTAL Convivial and trendy, this retiring yet far-from-shy place on the garish market square has an attractively informal ambience and a positive price/quality ratio. Behind its narrow, hard-to-spot 17th-century facade, even a capacity crowd of 150 diners can seem sparsely dispersed at the plain wood tables on multiple floors around a central stairwell. The decor beneath the timber ceiling beams is spare, tastefully tattered, and speckled with paintings by local artists. Service for office workers doing lunch is fast but not furious; in the evenings you're expected to linger. In summertime you can dine alfresco in a garden courtyard at the back. Despite being modern in tone and to an extent in cuisine, offering plenty of salads and other light fare, Keizershof is too smart to let you miss out on traditional Belgian standbys like *Gentse stoverij* (Ghent stew) and *mosselen* (mussels).

Vrijdagmarkt 47. ✆ **09/223-44-66.** www.keizershof.net. Main courses 8.50€–17€ ($11–$22); *dagschotel* 8.50€ ($11); fixed-price menus 9.50€–20€ ($12–$25). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

't Buikske Vol ★★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This is one of the city's gems, thanks to chef Peter Vyncke's insistence on the best ingredients, served in a cozy, intimate atmosphere. In recent times he has done even better, delivering the same quality at lower prices. It isn't open much, but when it is, it's busy.

Kraanlei 17. ✆ **09/225-18-80.** www.buikskevol.com. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 14€–25€ ($18–$31); fixed-price menus 14€–42€ ($18–$52). AE, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri noon–2pm and 7–10pm; Sat 7–10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Amadeus ★ RIBS/CONTINENTAL Sure, there are vegetarian and fish plates, but all of Ghent comes here for the all-you-can-eat spareribs dinner: a slab of cooked ribs served on a tray with a choice of sauces and a baked potato. If you're up to it, you can order another and another and another. A bottle of wine is on the table, and you pay for what you drink from it. The decor is sumptuously Art Nouveau with burnished wood, mirrors, and colored glass, and the ambience is relaxed.

Plotersgracht 8–10. ✆ **09/225-13-85.** Spareribs dinner 18€ ($23). MC, V. Daily 6pm–midnight.

4 Seeing the Sights

Ghent's historic monuments have not all been prettified. Some of them look downright gray and forbidding, which, oddly enough, gives them a more authentic feel. The Castle of the Counts of Flanders was actually *meant* to look gray and forbidding, since the citizens of Ghent were so often in revolt against its overlord.

This is a city to be seen on foot. Indeed, only by walking its streets, gazing at its gabled guild houses and private mansions, and stopping on one of its bridges to look down at the canal below can you begin to get a sense of the extraordinary vigor of the people who have lived here over the centuries.

The "Three Towers of Ghent" you often hear referred to are St. Bavo's Cathedral, the Belfry, and St. Nicholas's Church, which form a virtually straight line pointing towards St. Michael's Bridge.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Belfort en Lakenhalle (Belfry and Cloth Hall) ★★ Just across the square from the cathedral, in the heart of Ghent, the richly ornate Gothic Cloth Hall and Belfry tower above it together form a glorious medieval ensemble. The Cloth Hall, dating from 1425 to 1445 (though the finishing touches weren't added until 1903), is where cloth was stored and traded, and was the gathering place of wool and cloth merchants. A baroque extension from 1741 was used as a prison, known as *De Mammelokker* (The Suckler), from a relief above the doorway that depicts the legend of Cimon, starving to death in prison, being suckled by his daughter Pero. Appropriately enough, this newer section is now the offices of the city's *Ombudsvrouw* (Ombudswoman).

A World Heritage site, the Belfry, dating from 1314 to 1338, is 91m (295 ft.) high and has a gilded copper dragon at its summit. It holds the great bells that have rung out Ghent's civic pride down through the centuries, the most beloved being a 1315 giant known as Roeland, destroyed by Charles V in 1540 as a punishment for Ghent's latest act of insubordination. Pieter Hemony, the noted 17th-century Dutch bell-founder, cast 37 of the 54 bells that now make up the huge carillon from the remains of Roeland. The carillon rings out in concert each Friday and Sunday from 11:30am to 12:30pm. The massive Triomphante, cast in 1659 to 1660 to replace the favorite, now rests in a small park at the foot of the Belfry, still bearing the crack it sustained in 1914. Take the elevator up to the Belfry's upper gallery, 66m (215 ft.) high, to see both the bells and a fantastic panoramic view of the city. A great iron chest was kept in the Belfry's *Secret* to hold the all-important charters that spelled out privileges the guilds and the burghers of medieval Ghent wrested from the counts of Flanders.

Sint-Baafsplein. ✆ **09/223-99-22.** Admission 3€ ($3.75) adults, .90€ ($1.15) children 7–12, free for children under 7. Mid-Mar to mid-Nov daily 10am–12:30pm and 2–5:30pm; free guided tours Easter vacations and May–Sept 2:10, 3:10, and 4:10pm.

Gravensteen (Castle of the Counts) ★ "Grim" is the word that springs to mind when you first see this fortress, crouching like a gray stone lion over the city and clearly designed by the counts of Flanders, whose seat it was, to send a message to rebellion-inclined Gentenaars. The burghers of Ghent looked on their hometown as an independent city-state, on the model of Florence, not as a mere component of some blue blood's realm, and they were often in arms against the authority the castle was intended to uphold. The outcome was invariably defeat for them, but that didn't stop them from coming back for more whenever they felt the big wheel was trampling on their rights. It's safe to say that the castle's very appearance did much to instill the awe and fear necessary to keep the people of Ghent in line.

It was built by Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, shortly after he returned from the Crusades in 1180 with images of similar crusader castles in Syria fixed firmly in his mind. According to local legend—supported by Gallo-Roman artifacts uncovered in excavations—the count built on foundations originally laid down by Count Baldwin Iron Arm in the 800s. If the castle's walls, 2m (6 ft.) thick, battlements, and turrets failed to intimidate attackers, the count could always turn to a well-equipped torture chamber inside. You can view relics of that chamber—a small guillotine with an authentic original blade, spiked iron collars, racks, branding irons, thumb screws, and a special kind of pitchfork designed to make certain that people being burned at the stake stayed in the flames—in a small museum in the castle, along with weapons and suits of armor. On a happier note, if you climb to the ramparts of the high building in the center, the donjon, your reward is a great view of Ghent's rooftops and towers.

Sint-Veerleplein. ✆ **09/225-93-06.** www.gent.be/gravensteen. Admission 6€ ($7.50) adults, free for children under 12. Apr–Sept daily 9am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 9am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2 and Dec 25–26.

Sint-Baafskathedraal (St. Bavo's Cathedral) ★★★ Even if you see nothing else in Ghent, you shouldn't miss this massive cathedral. Don't be put off by its rather unimpressive exterior, an uncertain mixture of Romanesque, Gothic, and baroque architecture, which lacks a certain fluidity of form. The interior is filled with priceless paintings, sculptures, screens, memorials, and carved tombs. About midway along the vaulted nave is a remarkable pulpit (1741) in white marble entwined with oak, reminiscent of Bernini. The baroque organ from 1653 is the biggest in the Low Countries, and it sure sounds like the loudest when it's in full voice.

St. Bavo's showpiece is the 24-panel altarpiece ***The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*** ★★★, completed by Jan van Eyck in 1432. Van Eyck's luminous use of oils and naturalistic portrayal of nature and people represented a giant step away from the rigid style of Gothic religious art. But besides its importance in the history of art, the *Mystic Lamb* is spellbinding in its own right. The work was commissioned for this very chapel by a wealthy alderman in 1420. The original artist was Jan's brother Hubert van Eyck, but the piece was completed by Jan after Hubert's death in 1426.

Other art treasures include Rubens's recently restored *The Conversion of St. Bavo* (1623), in the Rubens Chapel on the semicircular ambulatory behind the high altar. The Romanesque crypt holds a wealth of religious antiquities, vestments, sculptures, and paintings. Look for faint frescoes still on some of the arches (some frescos were cleaned away entirely during previous restorations). Though the church was constructed in the 14th and 15th centuries, the crypt contains traces of the earlier 12th-century Church of St. John.

During the period of closure of the city's Museum of Fine Arts (see below), Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Bearing of the Cross* will be displayed in the crypt.

Sint-Baafsplein. ✆ **09/269-20-45.** Admission: Cathedral and Crypt free; *Mystic Lamb* chapel 3€ ($3.75) adults (includes audio guide in English), 1.50€ ($1.90) children 6–12, free for children under 6. Cathedral and Crypt: Apr–Oct daily 8:30am–6pm; Nov–Mar daily 8:30am–5pm; closed to tourist visits Sun morning and religious holidays, and during services. *Mystic Lamb* chapel: Apr–Oct Mon–Sat 9:30am–4:45pm, Sun 1–4:30pm; Nov–Mar Mon–Sat 10:30am–3:45pm, Sun 1–3:30pm.

GRASLEI & KORENLEI ★★

Two beautiful canalside streets just west of Korenmarkt, **Graslei** and **Korenlei** are each home to a solid row of towering, gabled guild houses built in a variety of architectural styles between the 1200s and 1600s, when the Leie waterway between them formed the city's harbor, the **Tussen Bruggen (Between the Bridges).** To fully appreciate their majesty, stroll down one street, then walk up onto the high **Sint-Michielsbrug (St. Michael's Bridge)** on the south side and pause to admire the fabulous and famous view of the two streets as a whole, before crossing to the opposite bank.

Try to conjure up in your imagination the craftsmen, tradesmen, and merchants for whom these elegant buildings were the very core of commercial and civil existence. The dramas that unfolded within the walls of each are enough to fill a library of books based on Ghent's independence of spirit. This is an ideal spot for leisurely exploration and for snapping a picture that captures the essence of Ghent.

On Graslei the building at no. 9, from 1435, was the first Korenmetershuis (House of the Grain Measurers); no. 12, the second, or annex House of the Grain Measurers, from 1698; no. 14, from 1531, was the ornate Brabant Gothic Gildehuis van de Vrije Schippers (House of the Free Boatmen), decorated with symbols of boats and boatmen on its sandstone facade. Among the highlights across the water on Korenlei are no. 7, from 1739, a Flemish baroque building called Het Anker (the Anchor), with the roof a gilded sailing ship, which was the Gildehuis van de Onvrije Schippers (House of the Tied Boatmen); and no. 9, the 16th-century De Zwane (The Swan), formerly a brewery.

There's an equally good outlook from Grasbrug, the bridge crossing the north end of the old harbor, at the junction of the Lieve Canal and the Leie River.

MORE MUSEUMS OF INTEREST

Bijlokemuseum Weapons, uniforms, clothing, and household items from the everyday life of years past are on view in a 14th-century former Cistercian convent. Authentic works of art of Ghent and Flanders are exhibited inside the "House of the Abbess," an exhibit space within the museum.

Godshuizenlaan 2 (south of the center). ✆ **09/225-11-06.** Admission 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, free for children under 12. Thurs 10am–1pm and 2–6pm; Sun 2–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2 and Dec 25–26.

Huis van Alijn (Alijn House) ★ Set in a cluster of folksily restored almshouses from the 1300s, Ghent's fascinating folklore museum is set in a tranquil, grassy courtyard that creates an oasis of peace in the city center. Inside the almshouse cottages are authentic replicas of typical rooms in homes at the turn of the 20th century and in places where crafts and skills such as weaving, metalwork, and carpentry were practiced. There's a marionette theater that presents performances on specified days of the week (check with the tourist office for current schedules).

Kraanlei 65 (across the Lieve waterway from Vrijdagmarkt). ✆ **09/269-23-50.** www.huisvanalijn.be. Admission: museum 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.75€ ($2.20) children 6–18, free for children under 6, free for individual visitors Sun 10am–1pm; marionette theater 2.50€ ($3.15). Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25.

Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Fine Arts Museum) ★★ This fine museum houses both ancient and modern art masterpieces. Highlights include works by Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyck, Hieronymus Bosch, and Théodore Géricault, along with such moderns as James Ensor, Theo van Rysselberghe, George Minne, and Constant Permeke. ***Note:*** The museum is closed for renovations until 2006; during the period of closure, exhibits from the collection will be mounted at the nearby Leopold Barracks, Charles de Kerchovelaan 187A (✆ **09/240-07-00**); and Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Bearing of the Cross* will be displayed in the crypt of St. Bavo's Cathedral.

Citadelpark (near Sint-Pieters rail station). ✆ **09/222-17-03.** www.mskgent.be. Admission 2.50€ ($3.15) adults, 1.20€ ($1.50) seniors and ages 12–25, free for children under 12; free for individual visitors Sun 10am–1pm. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2 and Dec 25–26.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Ghent's large **Stadhuis (Town Hall)** ★, Botermarkt/Hoogpoort (✆ **09/223-99-22**), turns a rather plain Renaissance profile to Botermarkt, and an almost garishly ornamented Gothic face to Hoogpoort. Its schizophrenic appearance probably came about because its construction, started in 1518 under the direction of Mechelen architect Rombout Keldermans, was interrupted by Emperor Charles V in 1539, began again at the end of that century, was halted once more in the early 1600s, and wasn't completed until the 18th century. The changing public tastes and available monies of those years are reflected in the building's styles. In its Pacificatiezaal (Pacification Room), the Pacification of Ghent was signed in 1567. This document declared to the world the repudiation by the Low Countries provinces of Spanish Habsburg rule and their intention to permit freedom of religion within their boundaries. The Town Hall can be visited on guided tours (May–Oct Mon–Thurs 3pm) that depart from the tourist office in the Belfry cellar.

Throughout the city's long history, when trouble erupted in Ghent, as it so often did, the huge **Vrijdagmarkt (Friday Market Square)** was nearly always the rallying point. The statue of Jacob van Artevelde that stands in the square is

The Good News from Ghent

On Christmas Eve 1814, in a mansion at Veldstraat 45–47, south of Korenmarkt, John Quincy Adams, the future sixth president of the United States, signed the Treaty of Ghent that brought to an end the War of 1812 with Great Britain. Peace came too late to save the White House, though. Along with most other public buildings in Washington, it was burned by the British when they captured the city in August 1814 and chased President James Madison out of the capital. It took weeks for word of the treaty to cross the Atlantic, affording Andrew Jackson time to exact revenge by defeating the British assault on New Orleans in January 1815.

The building on Veldstraat now houses a department store, and sports a 1964 plaque from the United States Daughters of 1812 thanking the people of Ghent for their hospitality to the U.S. delegation.

a tribute to a 14th-century rebel leader; its base is adorned with the shields of some 52 guilds. The square is also the location of the building in which Belgium's Socialist Party was born under the direction of Ghent's native son, Edward Anseele. Today this is a major shopping area and the scene of lively street markets on Wednesday and Friday mornings and Saturday afternoons. A short distance away, the smaller **Groot Kanonplein** square is guarded by a gigantic cannon known as Mad Meg *(Dulle Griet),* which thundered away in the 1400s in the service of the Burgundian armies.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS

A tour that should be a part of every visitor's itinerary is a **boat ride** ★ along the canals. Open and covered boats, which feature a narrative commentary in several languages, depart from boat docks on Graslei, Korenlei, and Groentenmarkt. There's a variety of options, with tours lasting from 40 to 90 minutes. Frequency ranges from every 10 minutes daily during the busiest period in summer to a few tours per day on weekends in winter. Fares begin at 5€ ($6.25) for adults and 2.50€ ($3.15) for children under 12 for a basic tour, to 9€ ($11) for adults and 4.50€ ($5.65) for children under 12 for a longer tour. The tour companies are: **Gent Watertourist** (✆ **09/266-05-22;** www.gent-watertoerist.be) for departures from Graslei; **De Bootjes van Gent-Rederij Dewaele** (✆ **09/223-88-53;** www.debootjesvangent.be) for departures from Korenlei; and **Rederij De Gentenaer** (✆ **0477/36-48-20;** www.degentenaer.be) for summer-only departures from Groentenmarkt.

On 1 evening a week during July and August, you can take a 5-hour **dinner-dance cruise** on the Leie River. This costs 37€ ($46) for adults and 27€ ($34) for children under 12, and advance booking is required. The cruises are operated by **Benelux Rederij** (✆ **09/225-15-05;** www.benelux-rederij.com).

The tourist office can arrange qualified guides for private **walking tours,** at a charge of 50€ ($63) for the first 2 hours (Mon–Fri) and 25€ ($31) for each additional hour. Also ask them about organized group-walking tours sometimes conducted during summer months at a fee of 6€ ($7.50) for adults and free for children under 12 (admission to see *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* included).

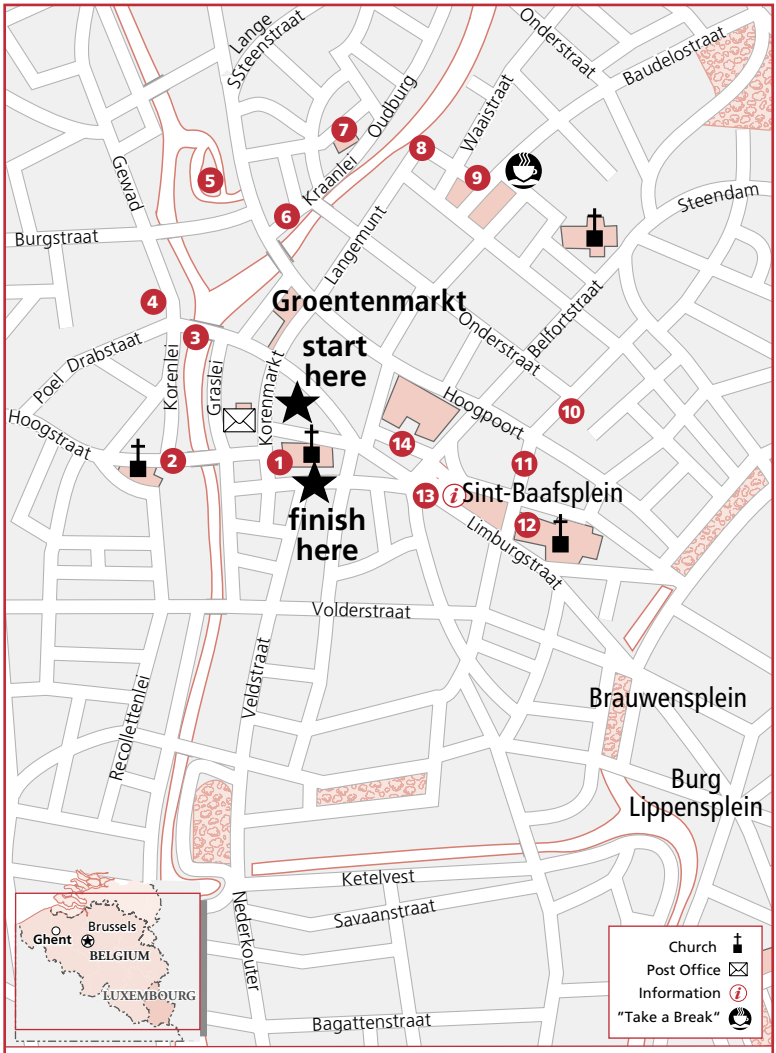
From Easter to October **horse-drawn carriages** (✆ **09/227-62-46**) that seat up to five people depart from Sint-Baafsplein from 10am to 6pm for half-hour rides that cost 25€ ($31) per carriage.

WALKING TOUR HISTORIC GHENT

Start:	**Korenmarkt.**
Finish:	**Korenmarkt.**
Time:	**3 hours, longer should you linger in museums and at other points of interest along the way.**
Best Times:	**Morning or afternoon.**
Worst Times:	**Museums along the route are closed in the evenings and on Mondays, so if you should want to take in one or more, you'd need to avoid these times.**

Ghent combines stellar medieval and other historic sights with touches of gritty urban reality and the bustling character of a genuine, living city. You'll get to view some of the best of all these worlds on this stroll through the Old Center.

Walking Tour: Historic Ghent



1 St. Nicholas's Church
2 St. Michael's Church
3 Korenlei and Graslei
4 Design Museum Gent
5 Castle of the Counts (Gravensteen)
6 Patershol
7 Huis van Alijn
8 Groot Kanonplein
9 Vrijdagmarkt
10 Zandberg
11 Biezekapelstraat
12 St. Bavo's Cathedral
13 Belfry and Cloth Hall
14 Town Hall (Stadhuis)

The jump-off point, Korenmarkt, can be reached from Ghent's Sint-Pieters rail station by tram 1, 10, 11, or 12. On the east side of this bustling central square and public transportation hub is:

❶ Sint-Niklaaskerk (St Nicholas's Church)

An impressive mixture of Romanesque and the Flemish style known as Scheldt Gothic, the 13th- to 15th-century church has undergone extensive renovation work. Its belfry is one of the "three towers of Ghent" that form a distinctive city image—in fact it was the first of the three to grace the city skyline. A baroque high altar and other rich decorations embellish the interior.

At no. 4 on a narrow medieval street called Klein Turkije at the side of the church, a dismal-looking (on the outside) 13th-century inn, now a bar called Den Rooden Hoed, housed Albrecht Dürer in 1521 when he was court painter to the Habsburg Emperor Charles V.

Across the square is the city's neo-Gothic former main post office, from 1904, which has been redeveloped as a shopping center.

Take Sint-Michielshelling, at the side of the old post office, and climb up to the Sint-Michielsbrug (St Michael's Bridge). From here you have a fine view of the three medieval towers of Sint-Niklaaskerk, the Belfry, and St. Bavo's Cathedral, all in a line. Cross over Sint-Michielshelling and descend to:

❷ Sint-Michielskerk (St. Michael's Church)

This solid-looking 15th- to 17th-century, more-or-less Gothic church (that never quite got completed in any style) contains a painting by Van Dyck, *The Crucifixion* (1629), but the church is rarely open.

Re-cross Sint-Michielsbrug and descend to the Leie River and the waterside at:

❸ Graslei and Korenlei

These two quays lined with handsome guild houses facing each other on either bank of the Leie were the heart of Ghent's medieval port. Today they are the starting point for canal-and-river boat tours of the city, and a magnet for photographers (see "Graslei & Korenlei" above).

You get more fine views on the water from the pretty little Grasbrug bridge over the Leie at the north end of Korenlei and Graslei. From here, on the left bank, take Jan Breydelstraat to no. 5 for the:

❹ Design Museum Gent

Housed in a graceful old mansion with a central courtyard (the Hotel De Coninck, from 1755), the collections here cover both antique and modern in furnishings, household accessories, ceramics, and more. Across the street is the notable French restaurant Jan Breydel (see "Where to Dine" earlier in this chapter).

At the end of Jan Breydelstraat, go right and cross the Lieve waterway by the bridge on Rekelingestraat. To your left is the:

❺ Gravensteen (Castle of the Counts)

The lugubrious fortress-seat of the counts of Flanders on the Lieve served a double purpose: to protect the count's lands from foreign invaders and protect his person from the slings and arrows of domestic strife (see "The Top Attractions" earlier in this chapter).

Cross Sint-Veerleplein and Geldmuntstraat into waterside Kraanlei. Off to your left, behind Kraanlei and reachable by various side streets, is:

❻ Patershol

This compact medieval district was home to the city's craftspeople and laborers. Restored and to an extent gentrified, it is well worth a stroll through to take in its atmospheric, traffic-free streets and to note some spiffy restaurants and bars that have taken root in the refurbished old buildings.

The problem is, Kraanlei is also worth taking in. A solution is to make a clockwise circuit through Patershol, beginning by going left on Hertogstraat, near the start of Kraanlei,

and then keeping to the right on Plotersgracht, Rodekoningstraat, and Corduwaniersstraat, which brings you back via a left on Hertogstraat to your point of departure on Kraanlei. Along the way, note for possible future reference the world-cuisine cafe-restaurant Vier Tafels at Plotersgracht 6.

Back on Kraanlei, continue to the city's folklore museum, at no. 65, in the:

❼ Huis van Alijn

Housed in the cottages of a medieval almshouse complex around a courtyard, the museum takes as its theme life and culture in turn-of-the-19th-century Ghent (see "More Museums of Interest" above).

Before crossing over the river on the next bridge, stop to admire the beautifully decorated facades of the old houses at Kraanlei 79 and 81, both from 1669. No. 79 is called De Fluitspeler (The Flute Player), after the carving of a flautist on the gable medallion. No. 81 has been dubbed De Zeven Werken van Barmhartigheid (The Seven Works of Charity), after carved images of six of the works and its own former role as an inn as the seventh. Now, it is the counter-intuitively named French restaurant De Hel (Hell), whose motto is: "Because enjoyment is no longer a sin."

Cross over the Leie on the bridge at Mersenniersstraat to:

❽ Groot Kanonplein

"Big Cannon Square" is so called because of an outsized 15th-century bronze artillery piece, known as Dulle Griet (Mad Meg), deployed in the square. The gun looks like it's been positioned to slam its big stone cannonballs into any likely target—rebellious citizenry, perhaps—that heaves into view from neighboring Vrijdagmarkt.

Continue straight ahead into:

❾ Vrijdagmarkt

The Friday Market square might well have been a source of suitable targets. The middle of the square is occupied by a sculpture from 1863 of local hero Jacob van Artevelde (ca. 1290–1345), who led an insurgency against the counts of Flanders. He was initially successful but was later murdered (see "More Attractions" above).

Among the many eateries on the square is:

TAKE A BREAK
Keizershof, Vrijdagmarkt 47 (✆ **09/223-44-66**), a relaxed yet trendy place on several floors (see "Where to Dine" earlier in this chapter).

If you'd sooner have a drink than a meal, I recommend a course of study at the Bieracademie at no. 50, a great Old Flemish tavern where no fewer than 250 different beers are waiting for you (see "Ghent After Dark" below).

From Vrijdagmarkt, take Vlas Markt, which you'll easily recognize by the gloomy Romanesque/Gothic pile of the Sint-Jacobskerk (St James's Church). Go right, into Koningstraat, and keep straight ahead to:

❿ Zandberg

This small square contains a stone obelisk surmounted by a French imperial eagle, erected in 1810 to commemorate a visit by Napoleon during the French occupation.

Cross over Hoogpoort into:

⓫ Biezekapelstraat

The entrance to this narrow street is flanked by two impressive dwellings that belonged to the powerful medieval Van der Sikkelen family: a bleak fortified 13th-century mansion on the left, and a graceful 15th-century mansion on the right, indicating that the family had lightened up with the progression of the centuries.

Further along, music students can be seen going to and fro under a relief of Orpheus serenading animals with his lyre, at Ghent's recently restored Koninklijk Conservatorium (Royal

Conservatory), in the rambling 14th- to 15th-century Achter Sikkel house, which belonged to the Van der Sikkelens.

Dead ahead, a fine view framed by Biezekapelstraat's houses, looms the tower of:

⓬ Sint-Baafskathedraal (St. Bavo's Cathedral)

The city's 13th- to 16th-century cathedral is well worth visiting in its own right, and for its treasures, which include one of the finest works of medieval art, the famous polyptych altarpiece by Jan van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (see "The Top Attractions" earlier in this chapter).

On the square outside St. Bavo's, Sint-Baafsplein, on which is set a rectangular water pool, you can admire the graceful exterior of the neo-Renaissance Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg (Royal Netherlandic Theater), also known as the Groot Huis (Grand House), from 1899. Look out also for the Hof Hamelinck building at no. 10, dating from 1739, which was formerly a theater; note the bust of the Roman goddess Juno on the facade.

Cross to the far side of the square to the:

⓭ Belfort en Lakenhalle (Belfry and Cloth Hall)

This Gothic medieval complex of bell tower and cloth exchange is evidence of Ghent's power and wealth during the Middle Ages, when it was for a time the richest city north of the Alps (see "The Top Attractions" earlier in this chapter).

Go north across Gouden Leeuwplein (Golden Lion Sq.) to Botermarkt and the:

⓮ Stadhuis (Town Hall)

Although it was constructed in fits and starts over a period of nearly 4 centuries from 1518, and in a variety of architectural styles, this still adds up to one of the most handsome civic buildings in Belgium. Inside, the magnificent Pacificatiezaal is where the Pacification of Ghent, aimed at ending the religious wars in the Low Countries, was signed in 1576.

Across Botermarkt, the remarkable Sint-Jorishof/Cour St. Georges Hotel has been a place of lodging since 1228 (it was the quarters of the Guild of Crossbowmen). At the time of writing, it is closed, temporarily by all accounts, for badly needed repairs and restoration.

Return to Gouden Leeuwplein, passing by a modern fountain with a sculpture group of five naked, kneeling figures, to the Sint-Niklaaskerk, on the other side of which is your starting point on Korenmarkt.

5 Ghent After Dark

THE PERFORMING ARTS

From October to mid-June, international opera is performed in the 19th-century **De Vlaamse Opera,** Schouwburgstraat 3 (✆ **09/225-24-25**). Ghent venues for those marvelous Belgian puppet shows are: the folklore museum **Het Huis van Alijn,** Kraanlei 65 (✆ **09/269-23-50**), and **Teater Taptoe,** Forelstraat 91C (✆ **09/223-67-58**).

BARS & TAVERNS

In typical Flemish fashion, Ghent's favorite after-dark entertainment is frequenting atmospheric cafes and taverns. You should have a memorable evening in any one you choose. **De Witte Leeuw,** Graslei 6 (✆ **09/233-37-33**), has a 17th-century setting and more than 300 varieties of beer. At the Old Flemish tavern **Dulle Griet,** Vrijdagmarkt 50 (✆ **09/224-24-55**), also known as **Bieracademie,** you'll be asked to deposit one of your shoes before being given a

potent Kwak beer in the too-collectible glass with a wood frame that allows the glass to stand up—you too might need artificial support if you drink too much of this or any of the other 250 different beers in stock. The smallest building on Graslei, the Renaissance-style former Customs House from 1682, is now a nice little tavern called **Het Tolhuisje,** Graslei 11 (✆ **09/224-30-90**).

Groentenmarkt, near the Gravensteen, makes for a pretty good pub-crawl in an easily navigable area. In an old canal house, **Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant,** Groentenmarkt 9 (✆ **09/225-06-80**), has more than 100 different Belgian beers, including locally made Stopken. Of all the gin joints in town, **'t Dreupelkot,** Groentenmarkt 12 (✆ **09/224-21-20**), has to be the best. Ask owner Paul to recommend one of his 100 or so varieties of *jenever* (a stiff spirit similar to gin), served in tiny (but deadly) little glassfuls, or walk straight in and boldly go for a 64-proof Jonge Hertekamp or a 72-proof Pekèt de Houyeu; if they don't knock you down, you may be up for an 8-year-old 100-proof Filliers Oude Graanjenever or a 104-proof Hoogspanning. Across the tramlines, **Het Galgenhuisje,** Groentenmarkt 5 (✆ **09/233-42-51**), the oldest drinking spot in town (1783)—the name means "Little Gallows House"—is a tiny and, perforce, intimate place popular with students, and has a fine restaurant, 't Galgenkelder, downstairs in the cellar.

7

Antwerp

Antwerp (Antwerpen) is one of western Europe's most hidden gems. Most people think of it only as a port and center of the diamond trade. Yet, it is also easygoing, stylish, and filled with the monuments of a wealthy medieval and Renaissance period. Given that the city boasts a magnificent cathedral, a fine-arts museum full of Flemish masterpieces, a maze of medieval streets in the town center, and a vibrant nightlife and cultural scene, it's amazing that Antwerp has been relatively neglected by tourists. Suffice it to say that Amsterdammers head for Antwerp when they want to have a good time in a Low Countries' golden-age city.

As home to the world's fifth-largest port, Antwerp, 48km (30 miles) north of Brussels, 51km (31 miles) northeast of Ghent, has all the liveliness, sophistication, and occasional seediness that you would expect. It is also the acknowledged "Diamond Center of the World," the leading market for cut diamonds and second only to London as an outlet for raw and industrial diamonds. The diamond business is worth a sparkling $23 billion a year, which swamps Amsterdam's $1 billion—though you would never guess as much from the noise the Dutch city makes about its jewels and the discreet silence maintained by the Belgians.

The city (pop. 450,000), which is the capital town of Antwerpen province, owes its life to the Scheldt (Schelde) River, its soul to the artist Rubens, and its name to a giant of ancient days called Druon Antigon (see box below).

As for Rubens, that master is only one of several artists who left their baroque mark on the face of this city and a great love of beauty in the hearts

The Hand of Antwerp

Legend has it that a giant called Druon Antigon levied exorbitant tolls on every Scheldt boatman who passed his castle, and if anyone would not or could not pay up, the big man gleefully cut off the miscreant's hand and threw it into the river. Druon's comeuppance came from a Roman centurion named Silvius Brabo, who slew the giant and (as if that weren't enough) cut off his hand and threw it into the river, thus avenging the boatmen. The Flemish *handwerpen* (throwing of the hand) eventually became *Antwerpen,* the city's Flemish name (it's called *Anvers* in French).

Historians who deal only in dry facts tell a different story. They claim that sailors described the port city's location as *aan-de-werfen* (on the wharves). But to the people who live here, the severed, bleeding "Red Hand of Antwerp" is the symbol of their city. You find two statues in the town commemorating the Roman's act of revenge, and replicas of the giant's hand appear in everything from chocolate to brass.

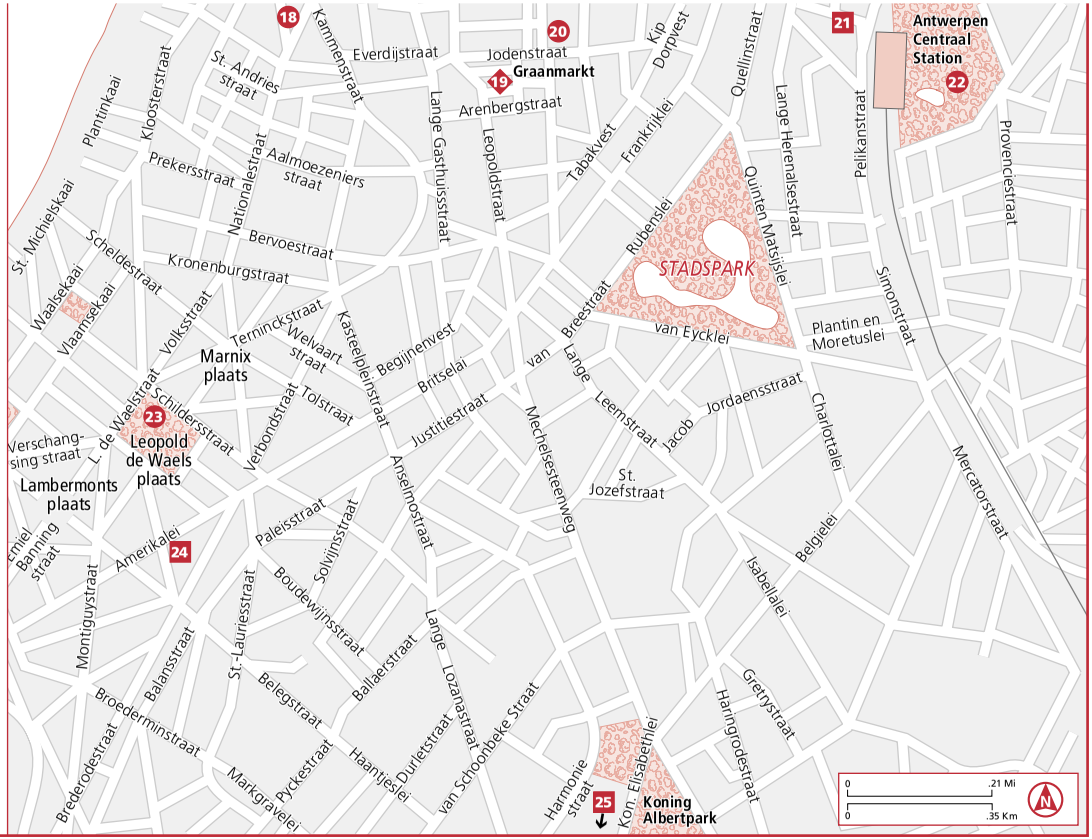
ATTRACTIONS

Antwerp Province Diamond Museum **17**
Antwerp Zoo **22**
Cathedral of Our Lady **7**
De Steen (Castle) **2**
MoMu **18**
Plantin-Moretus Museum **16**
Royal Museum of Fine Arts **23**
Rubens House **20**
Sint-Jacobskerk **14**
Stadhuis **3**
Vleeshuis **1**

ACCOMMODATIONS
Alfa De Keyser **21**
De Witte Lelie **12**
Firean **25**
Prinse **13**
Rubens-Grote Markt **6**
Rubenshof **24**

DINING
De Foyer **19**
De Manie **10**
De Peerdestal **9**
In de Schaduw van de Kathedraal **4**
Pottenbrug **11**
Rooden Hoed **8**
Sir Anthony van Dijck **5**
't Fornuis **15**

Church
Information
Post Office
Railway



of its inhabitants. You see that love expressed in their buildings, their public works of art, and the contents of some 20 museums.

1 Orientation

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE

Brussels National Airport is the main international airport for Antwerp (see "Orientation" in chapter 3). From the airport, the best way to get to Antwerp is by train, either direct or via Brussels.

Antwerp has its own airport, **Deurne Airport** (✆ **03/285-65-00**), 7km (4½ miles) east of the city, but other than a few scheduled flights from London, Manchester, and Liverpool in England operated by local carrier **VLM** (✆ **03/287-80-80;** www.vlm-airlines.com), not much in the way of international flights arrives at Deurne, so in a way—for now, at any rate—it's more useful to think of Brussels National as Antwerp's airport. If you do fly into Deurne, De Lijn bus no. 16 shuttles between the airport and Pelikaanstraat, outside Centraal Station in Antwerp center. Taxi fare to the center is around 12€ ($15).

BY TRAIN

The city is called Antwerp in English (and *Anvers* in French), but look out for its Flemish name, ANTWERPEN, on the name boards at **Centraal Station**, the city's cathedral-like main rail station, built between 1895 and 1905. Centraal Station, 1.5km (1 mile) east of the Grote Markt, is on the edge of the city center, in an area that's currently the focus of a great deal of construction activity. It's worthwhile taking a close look around the station (though maybe not when you're laden down with luggage), and view in particular the graceful ornamentation in the main hall. The original first-class waiting room is now the station cafe. There are coin-operated luggage lockers at Centraal Station. Antwerp's other mainline rail station is **Berchem,** 4km (2½ miles) south of the city center.

Trains arrive every 30 minutes or so from Brussels and Ghent. The trip time from both cities is around 30 minutes. Antwerp is on the **Thalys** high-speed train network that connects Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam (and Cologne via Brussels). From Paris, you can take the Thalys high-speed trains through Brussels direct to Antwerp, or the slower and cheaper International trains, changing in Brussels. From Amsterdam, you can go direct, either on the Thalys or the normal International and Inter-City trains. Reservations are required for Thalys. Most Thalys trains stop at Berchem, but a few serve Centraal Station. For all schedule and fare information, and for reservations, call ✆ **02/528-28-28.**

BY BUS

Most long-distance buses arrive and depart from the **bus station** on Franklin Rooseveltplaats, a short distance northwest of Centraal Station. Timetables and fare information are available from a kiosk in Centraal Station, and by calling ✆ **070/22-02-00.** The **Eurolines** company operates a daily service from London's Victoria Coach Station—via the Dover-Calais (France) ferry or the Channel Tunnel's Le Shuttle train—to Antwerp, stopping at Bruges and Ghent. The city can also be reached from around Europe on the Eurolines network, direct or via Brussels or Amsterdam. For schedule and fare information, contact Eurolines at ✆ **08705/808080** in Britain, or ✆ **02/274-13-50** in Belgium.

Impressions

This goodly ancient City methinks looks like a disconsolate Widow, or rather some super-annuated Virgin that hath lost her Lover. . . .

—James Howell, 1619

. . . in this city there is a square, the Meir, where every day at ten in the morning as many as two thousand people gather together to hear the latest news from all the foreign countries, because Antwerp corresponds with the whole world on account of its trade.

—Domenico Fantozzi Parma, secretary to Cardinal Rosetti, 1641

BY CAR

Going **by car,** major highways connecting to Antwerp's R1 Ring Expressway are A1/E19 from Brussels via Mechelen, and from Amsterdam; A12 from Brussels via Laeken; A14/E17 from Ghent; and N49 from Knokke, Bruges, and Zeebrugge, bypassing Ghent. By the fastest direct routes, Antwerp is 51km (32 miles) north of Brussels on A1/E19; 45km (28 miles) northeast of Ghent on A14/E17; and 102km (63 miles) east of Bruges on A10/E40 and A14/E17.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Antwerp city tourist office is **Toerisme Antwerpen,** Grote Markt 13, 2000 Antwerpen (✆ **03/232-01-03;** fax 03/203-95-91; www.visitantwerpen.be; tram: 2, 3, 4, 8, or 15), open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:45pm, and Sunday and holidays from 9am to 4:45pm. An **Info Desk** (same phone and fax numbers and Web address) at Koningin Astridplein 26, outside Centraal Station, is open the same hours as the main tourist office.

Both of these offices can provide some information on locations outside of the city, but the best tourist information on the environs of Antwerp and on side trips from the city is available from the administrative office (no personal visits) of **Toerisme Provincie Antwerpen,** Koningin Elisabethlei 16, 2018 Antwerpen (✆ **03/240-63-73;** fax 03/240-63-83; www.tpa.be).

CITY LAYOUT

Centraal Station serves as a focal point and itself is at the heart of a vibrant, multiethnic area. When you're standing in front of the station, the large square opposite you is Koningin Astridplein; to your right is Antwerp Zoo; and to your left is Pelikaanstraat, a major diamond-center street. De Keyserlei runs toward the river and joins the Meir, Antwerp's main shopping street. The Meir then leads into Schoenmarkt, a short street that curves around the 24-story Torengebouw to reach a large square called Groenplaats, where there's a statue of Rubens and the Cathedral of Our Lady. One block beyond Groenplaats (toward the river) puts you into the Grote Markt (Market Sq.), bordered by the Renaissance Town Hall and 16th-century guild houses, and with a fountain-statue of the Roman soldier Brabo. Follow a quaint little street named Suikerrui (Sugar Quay) down to the river, where you see a medieval fortified castle, the Steen, which houses the maritime museum.

An adequate **city map** for most visitors' purposes is available from the tourist office for .50€ (65¢). For more detailed use you have to buy the *Antwerp A–Z* map, available at bookstores and news vendors.

GETTING AROUND

Antwerp is a good city for pedestrians, its major sightseeing attractions easily reached from one major street, which changes its name as it goes along. Going by tram is the best way to get around the city; a single fare is 1.20€ ($1.50). The most useful trams for tourists are lines 2 and 15 that run between Groenplaats, near the cathedral, and Centraal Station. Public transportation information is available from a kiosk inside Centraal Station, and by calling **De Lijn** (✆ **070/22-02-00**).

The numbers to call for a taxi are ✆ **03/646-83-83** and 03/238-38-38. Taxis cannot be hailed on the street but can be found at stands. The fare for the first kilometer or part thereof is 2.50€ ($3.15) between 6am and 10pm, and 4.50€ ($5.65) from 10pm to 6am; each additional kilometer costs 1.05€ ($1.30) throughout the day or night.

You can rent bicycles at Centraal Station; but be warned, traffic can be heavy and hard to negotiate.

FAST FACTS: Antwerp

American Express There is no office in Antwerp. The nearest is in Brussels (see "Fast Facts: Brussels" in chapter 3).

Area Code Antwerp's telephone area code is **03.** You need to dial **03** both inside Antwerp and from elsewhere in Belgium. Dial just **3** (without the initial 0) if you're phoning Antwerp from outside Belgium.

Business Hours **Banks** are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and 2 to 4:30 or 5pm. Open hours for **offices** are Monday to Friday from 9 or 10am to 4 or 5pm. Most **stores** are open Monday to Saturday from 9 or 10am to 6 or 7pm; some stay open on Friday until 8 or 9pm.

Car Rental There are two **Avis** offices, one at Plantin en Moretuslei 62 (✆ **03/218-94-96**) and a second at Boomsesteenweg 560 (✆ **03/829-10-00**). **Hertz** is at Deurne Airport (✆ **03/239-29-21**).

Currency Exchange The tourist office (see "Visitor Information" above) is a good place to change money and traveler's checks, as are banks. ATMs, identified by MISTER CASH and BANCONTACT signs, on the Grote Markt and at numerous other points in the city center, can be accessed by credit cards, bank cards, and charge cards linked to the Cirrus and PLUS networks.

Doctors & Dentists For required but nonemergency medical care in the Antwerp area, call ✆ **03/286-11-86** (for emergencies, see below). For emergency dental care, call ✆ **03/448-02-20.**

Emergencies For police assistance, call ✆ **101.** For an ambulance or the fire department, call ✆ **100.**

Hospital For medical assistance, go to **St. Elizabeth Hospital,** Leopoldstraat 26 (✆ **03/234-41-11**).

Newspapers & Magazines The ***Bulletin,*** Belgium's Brussels-based weekly magazine in English, also covers Antwerp, though not in as much depth as it does the capital. See also "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Police (Politie) In an emergency, call ✆ **101.** In nonurgent situations, go to **the Central Police Station,** Oudaan 5 (✆ **03/202-55-11**), or call the police information line (✆ **0800/123-12**).

Post Office The main post office is at Groenplaats 42, open Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to noon.

Restrooms See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2. Should you have a toilet emergency in the center of Antwerp, the very best address to find relief is at the Astrid Park Plaza Hotel, Koningin Astridplein 7 (✆ **03/203-12-34**), across the square from Centraal Station.

Safety Crime is more of a problem in Antwerp than it is in Bruges and Ghent—which is not the same thing as saying the city is unsafe. But it has a big international port and some of the low-life features that such places attract. After dark, you should exercise a little caution around Centraal Station and in the red-light district north of the Grote Markt, and it's probably wise to stay out of the Stadspark at this time. Take routine precautions against pickpocketing and other types of theft.

Telephones See "Area Code" above and "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Tipping See "Fast Facts: Belgium" in chapter 2.

Transit Info For information regarding tram, bus, and Métro service, call ✆ **070/22-02-00.**

2 Where to Stay

Rates in Antwerp are generally lower than in Brussels. You find the widest range of accommodations around Centraal Station and fewer choices within the town center. However, many of the big hotels are on the city's outskirts; most of these are geared to business travelers and offer substantial discounts for weekend stays.

The tourist office has a free, same-day reservation service—you make a small deposit, which is then deducted from your hotel bill. They also publish a booklet listing all Antwerp accommodations and rates.

A word of warning to budget travelers: The phrase "tourist room" that in other cities means an accommodations bargain in a private home means something rather different in Antwerp—it's a discreet way of advertising very personal services that have nothing to do with a room for the night.

VERY EXPENSIVE

De Witte Lelie ★★ A centrally located boutique hotel, the "White Lily" is set in three renovated and converted 17th-century gabled town houses with a garden courtyard. You might almost describe it as a "hip little hotel," except that this implies both trendiness and transience, and proprietor Monica Bock easily manages to keep her pride and joy on the right side of the line. It artfully combines old-fashioned ambience, exposed beams, marble fireplaces, antiques, and impeccable service, with a fine sense of modern style, distinctive design elements, and works of contemporary art. Each of the bright, tastefully furnished rooms has an individual character, and a "less is more" sensibility means that though on the small side they are not cluttered. While the white of the hotel's name is the presiding tone, color shows up in drapes, rugs, flowers, and other touches. The luxurious bathrooms are dazzlingly white. The breakfast room looks out on the courtyard.

Keizerstraat 16–18 (close to the Rockoxhuis), 2000 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/226-19-66.** Fax 03/234-00-19. www.dewittelelie.be. 10 units. 265€–495€ ($300–$525) double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 20€ ($25). Tram: 10 or 11 to Kipdorp. **Amenities:** Lounge; 24-hr. room service (5€/$6.25). *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Rubens Grote Markt ★★ Only steps away from the Grote Markt, this comfortable hotel with an attentive staff combines the classical elegance of a 16th-century mansion with plush, modern furnishings. The spacious rooms are individually decorated in a style that's a modern take on old-fashioned coziness, and from some of them you can see the cathedral steeple. Shady rooms are perked up with bright, tropical colors and sunny rooms have more muted, pastel tones. Bathrooms are not large but have marble fittings. Some of the rooms open onto an enclosed garden patio at the rear with an original colonnade, where breakfast is served in the summer; at other times you breakfast in an elegant dining room with a marble fireplace.

Oude Beurs 29 (1 block north of the Grote Markt), 2000 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/222-48-48.** Fax 03/225-19-40. www.hotelrubensantwerp.be. 36 units. 145€–255€ ($164–$556) double; 445€ ($556) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 15€ ($19). Tram: 10 or 11 to Wolstraat. **Amenities:** Bar; limited room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Alfa de Keyser This centrally located, seven-story, modern hotel has nicely furnished rooms. Some are modern in style, decorated with a pastel color scheme, while others are more classic in tone (done in warmer, wine-red colors). The front lobby is dark and quiet, with plants, a piano, and luxurious sofas. Guests can enjoy the fine Chagall restaurant and Paint Pot bar.

De Keyserlei 66–70 (next to Centraal Station), 2018 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/206-74-60.** Fax 03/232-39-70. www.nh-hotels.com. 123 units. 110€–200€ ($138–$250) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: Centraal Station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; heated indoor pool; health club; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Firean ★ *Value* In a superb, restored Art Deco mansion from 1929, replete with delicate enamel work and Tiffany glass, this family-owned hotel is a bit off of the beaten track south of the center. The Deco elements are offset, and given added warmth, by a wealth of Persian rugs, antiques, and chandeliers. Each of the individually styled rooms is a cozy delight of pastel tones, tasteful furnishings, armchairs or sofas, and comfortable beds. The Iserbyt family proprietors take considerable pride in their establishment, as you will find in their attention to detail and their "nothing-is-too-much-trouble" attitude. Breakfast is served in the garden in fine weather, and having the hotel's elegant restaurant Minerva just a few steps away should make a trip to one of the center-city eateries for dinner all but superfluous.

Karel Oomsstraat 6 (at Koning Albertpark), 2018 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/237-02-60.** Fax 03/238-11-68. www.hotelfirean.com. 15 units. 152€–220€ ($190–$275) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 2 to Jan van Rijswicklaan. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Belgian); bar; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Prinse ★ If you like modernity and efficiency in your everyday life, but you're not averse to mixing this with a dollop of historicity, this hotel on a quiet street between Centraal Station and the town center might be the place for you. It offers cool modern rooms in a restored 16th-century residence—over-restored, some guests might conclude. The style takes its cue from the modish lobby area designed by local light Fabiaan Van Severen, and moves on with its signature black leather-and-wood, which some might find a bit impersonal, to other interiors. Yet the effect is softened overall by a friendly, personal ambience, and in the rooms by a hushed atmosphere and a comfortable feel to the beds and some other furnishings. The hotel has both a pleasant terrace and a tranquil courtyard garden.

Keizerstraat 63 (at Prinsesstraat), 2000 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/226-40-50.** Fax 03/225-11-48. www.hotelprinse.be. 35 units. 116€–137€ ($145–$171) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking 8€ ($10). Tram: 10 or 11 to Prinsesstraat. **Amenities:** Lounge; bar. *In room:* TV.

INEXPENSIVE

Rubenshof ★★ *Value* This small family hotel used to be a residence of the Belgian cardinal, dating from 1860. Perhaps this explains the heavenly atmosphere. The place has a remarkably ornate interior, with painted ceilings, chandeliers, and a great deal of ornamentation that includes wood carvings and stained-glass windows. Some of this is Art Nouveau, in a "new" wing that was added to the building in 1910 and includes the breakfast room. The guest rooms are somewhat plainer than the public spaces—with the exception of the Chinese Room—but they're still comfortably and adequately furnished and tastefully decorated. A small but tolerably devoted staff adds the personal touch.

Amerikalei 115–117 (across from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts), 2000 Antwerpen. ✆ **03/237-07-89.** Fax 03/248-25-94. www.rubenshof.be. 22 units, 14 with bathroom. 40€ ($50) double without bathroom; 65€ ($81) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited street parking. Tram: 12 or 24 to Brederodestraat. *In room:* No phone.

3 Where to Dine

VERY EXPENSIVE

't Fornuis ★★ FRENCH Behind the heavy doors of a 16th-century stone house, this Michelin two-star restaurant offers the finest dining in town in an intimate room furnished in oak. Chef Johan Segers comes to your table to explain each succulent dish. Although you could hardly go wrong, the sole with rhubarb is particularly outstanding. Guests are also invited to visit the superb wine cellar, which contains 4,000 bottles of wine.

Reyndersstraat 24. ✆ **03/233-62-70.** Reservations required. Main courses 22€–52€ ($28–$65). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 7–10pm.

EXPENSIVE

De Manie ★ FRENCH This bright, modern restaurant comes up with such originals as an appetizer of quail salad with goat cheese and artichoke, and baked goose liver with bilberries and honey, as well as innovative main dishes. Filet of hare with cranberries, chicory, and juniper sauce, and grilled wood pigeon with gratinéed Brussels sprouts, are both typical of menu specialties, which change every 6 months. The food is excellent, and the setting is very relaxing.

Hendrik Conscienceplein 3 (near Sint-Katelijnevest). ✆ **03/232-64-38.** Main courses 24€–32€ ($30–$40); fixed-price menus 24€–46€ ($30–$58). AE, MC, V. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat noon–2:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm; Sun 6:30–9:30pm. Métro: Groenplaats.

In de Schaduw van de Kathedraal ★ BELGIAN This attractive restaurant in the city center features traditional Belgian cuisine gussied up just a bit. Mussels and eel assume several guises on the menu, and beef is also well represented. The specialty of the house is bouillabaisse, which claims to be for two but is actually enough to feed a family of five. If the prices here seem a little inflated, it's probably because of the excellent location; after all, this restaurant lies, as its name says, "in the shadow of the cathedral."

Handschoenmarkt 17–21. ✆ **03/232-40-14.** Main courses 20€–45€ ($25–$56). AE, DC, MC, V. June–Sept daily noon–3pm and 6–10pm; Oct–May Wed–Mon noon–3pm and 6–10pm. Métro: Groenplaats.

MODERATE

De Peerdestal ★ CONTINENTAL In this large, rustic, two-floor restaurant, you can enjoy a light meal of a salad or indulge in heartier fare such as mussels, fish, or steak (horse meat is a specialty here). Despite its size, there's something almost cozy about the place. Patrons frequently read newspapers as they eat at the long bar. They do a nice crispy salad with marinated goat's cheese, bacon, and a honey dressing; and if you regularly take your steak raw, chopped, mixed with raw onions, and served with a béarnaise sauce, then you should love it here.

Wijngaardstraat 8 (near the Cathedral). ✆ **03/231-95-03.** www.depeerdestal.be. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main courses 15€–20€ ($19–$25); fixed-price menu 38€ ($48). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–10pm. Métro: Groenplaats.

Pottenbrug ★ FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN The casual, relaxed atmosphere in this place, where you eat in cozy proximity to fellow diners, works well with the timber floorboards, the stove in full view, and a menu chalked on boards. The formula has changed little since Philip and Brigitte De Naeyer opened a quarter-century ago, even while the area has gone from seedy to chic, and it still appeals to a similar, arty clientele. But the menu, though it still offers traditional Flemish dishes, with Italian accents, has moved with the times. Among the best choices are the *parelhoen met balsamico* (stuffed guinea fowl in a balsamico sauce), the simple but refreshing *zomerse pastasla van de chef* (chef's summer pasta salad), and salmon or lobster accompanied by fresh pasta and cherry butter. An unusual and delicious dessert choice is the *olijfolieijs met witte truffelchocolade* (olive-oil ice cream and white truffle chocolate).

Minderbroedersrui 38 (2 blocks north of Hendrik Conscienceplein). ✆ **03/231-51-47.** www.pottenbrug.com. Main courses 14€–19€ ($18–$24); *dagschotel* (plate of the day) 13€ ($16). AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2pm and 6:30–10pm; Sat 6:30–11pm. Métro: Groenplaats.

Rooden Hoed ★ BELGIAN/FRENCH This pleasant, old-fashioned restaurant is the oldest in Antwerp, having been in business for more than 250 years. It serves good, hearty food, a mix of old-style regional cuisine and trendy new forms, at moderate prices. Mussels, a delicious *choucroute d'Alsace* (sausages with sauerkraut and mashed potatoes), chicken *waterzooï,* and fish specialties are all featured on the menu. Try an aperitif, or a snack, in the medieval cellar under the restaurant.

Oude Koornmarkt 25 (near the Cathedral). ✆ **03/233-28-44.** www.roodenhoed.be. Main courses 12€–20€ ($15–$25); fixed-price menus 25€–40€ ($31–$50). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm.

Sir Anthony Van Dijck ★★ BELGIAN/CLASSIC FRENCH A location amid the delightful 16th-century Vlaeykensgang courtyard's jumble of cafes, restaurants, and antique apartments all but guarantees a pleasant atmosphere here. This used to be a Michelin Star–rated restaurant, until owner and chef Marc Paesbrugghe got tired of staying on the Michelin treadmill and chose to do something less stressful and more fun. Reopened as a notably relaxed brasserie-restaurant, in a sparely elegant setting that's flooded with light from the old-world courtyard through big, arched windows, it still retains a commitment to good food. A fine seafood dish is the *waterzooï van staartvis* (*waterzooï* with poached monkfish), a traditional Flemish stew that's more commonly made with chicken nowadays but that started out with fish.

Oude Koornmarkt 16 (in Vlaeykensgang). ✆ **03/231-61-70.** www.siranthonyvandijck.be. Main courses 17€–28€ ($21–$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–1:30pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

INEXPENSIVE

De Foyer ✪ INTERNATIONAL This magnificent space is the foyer of the 19th-century Bourla Theater and is one of Antwerp's most popular addresses. With an ornately painted dome, potted palms, red velvet drapes, and marble columns, you would expect prices to be a lot higher than they are. The daily lunch buffet is a bargain considering that it includes an array of fish and vegetable salads, soup, several hot dishes, cheese, and pastries. At least try to stop in for tea or drinks if only to bask in the opulence.

Komedieplaats 18. ✆ **03/233-55-17.** www.defoyer.be. Reservations recommended on weekends. Light meals 7.50€–15€ ($9.40–$19); lunch buffet 18€ ($23). MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–midnight; Sat 11am–midnight; Sun 11am–6pm.

4 Seeing the Sights

The most colorful part of Antwerp is the medieval town center that fans out from the Grote Markt in a warren of winding streets. South of the town center is a fascinating district of shipping warehouses renovated into trendy bars, restaurants, and art galleries. Head to the streets around Vlaamsekaai and Waalsekaai.

Antwerp is a good walking city. Its major sightseeing attractions are easily reached from one major street that changes its name as it goes along: Italiëlei, Frankrijklei, Britselei, and Amerikalei. Most sights are within easy walking distance of the town center, but if the cobblestone streets start to wear through your shoes, you can always hop onto a tram.

The sightseeing treasures of Antwerp are best seen at a leisurely pace—after all, who would want to gallop through Rubens's home at a fast clip? But if time is a factor or if you'd like a good overview before striking out on your own, the city makes it easy by providing guides for walking tours, regularly scheduled coach tours, and a series of boat trips to view Antwerp from the water, as so many visitors through the centuries have first seen it (see "Organized Tours" later in this chapter).

If you're a dedicated do-it-yourselfer, you can get maps and sightseeing booklets from the tourist office to guide you. Walking trails marked within the city will lead you through typical streets and squares to find the main points of interest. There's even a free ferryboat ride across the Scheldt.

Many of Antwerp's museums and churches are open to the public either for free or at a minimal charge. Notice that nearly all museums are closed on Monday.

Warning: The area around Centraal Station, east of De Keyserlei and Koningin Astridplein, is somewhat seedy and has drug and prostitution problems.

Note: For many of the museums and churches in Antwerp (including some of those reviewed below), you can get information on the Web by visiting their common sites, respectively **http://museum.antwerpen.be** and **www.topa.be**.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen (Antwerp Royal Museum of Fine Arts) ✪✪✪ Housed in this impressive neoclassical building is the KMSKA's collection of paintings by Flemish old masters that is second to none in the world. Should you be an admirer of the great Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and all his works, you've come to the right place here, in the city where he made his home and his fortune. Antwerp's finest museum houses a gallery of his finest works. The marble entrance hall has frescoes

painted by Rubens and is alone just about worth the price of admission. Among them are more Rubens masterpieces in one place than anywhere else. To view them, pass through the ground-floor exhibitions of more-modern artists' canvases (including works by Ensor, Magritte, Permeke, and Delvaux) and ascend to the second floor, where you find Rubens, Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Dirck Bouts, Hans Memling, the Brueghel family, Rembrandt, and Hals. All told, these walls hold paintings spanning 5 centuries.

Leopold de Waelplaats 2. ✆ **03/238-78-09.** http://museum.antwerpen.be/kmska. Admission 5€ ($6.25) adults, 4€ ($5) seniors and students, free for children under 18; free admission for all last Wed of month. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 10am–6pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, and Dec 25.

Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal (Cathedral of Our Lady) ★★★ A masterpiece of Brabant Gothic architecture, this towering edifice, the largest church in the Benelux lands, is simply stunning, and you can see it from far outside the city. Begun in 1352 and completed by around 1520, it stands on the site of a 10th-century chapel dedicated to the Virgin that grew to be a church in the Romanesque style. There are seven aisles and 125 pillars, but of the original design's five towers, only one was completed. This one is the tallest church spire in the Low Countries, 123m (403 ft.) high, and the idea that the designers could have planned to construct five such behemoths is a graphic indication of the wealth and power of Antwerp at that time.

The cathedral's history includes a destructive fire in 1533, devastation by iconoclasts during the religious wars of the 16th century, deconsecration by anticlerical French revolutionaries in 1794 (resulting in the removal of its Rubens paintings), and a slow rebirth that began after Napoleon's defeat in 1815. Its interior embellishment is a mix of baroque and neoclassical. Today the cathedral houses four Rubens masterpieces, all of them altarpieces: *The Raising of the Cross* (1610), *The Descent from the Cross* (1614), *The Resurrection of Christ* (1612), and the *Ascension of the Virgin* (1626). Nicolas Rombouts's *Last Supper* (1503), an impressive stained-glass window, is also outstanding. Among many other notable works of art is a superb *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1350) in Carrara marble, by the anonymous Master of the Maasland marble Madonnas. During July and August the cathedral bells peal out in a carillon concert on Sunday from 3 to 4pm and on Monday from 8 to 9pm.

Handschoenmarkt (off of the Grote Markt). ✆ **03/213-99-51.** www.dekathedraal.be. Admission 2€ ($2.50), free for children under 12. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat and the day preceding a religious holiday 10am–3pm; Sun and religious holidays 1–4pm. Closed to tourist visits during services. Métro: Groenplaats.

Rubenshuis (Rubens House) ★★ Touch Antwerp's cultural heart at the house where Antwerp's most illustrious son, the artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), lived and worked. A visit here is essential if you are fully to appreciate what you see elsewhere in the city. Far from being the stereotypical starving artist, Rubens amassed a tidy fortune from his paintings that allowed him to build this impressive mansion in 1610, along what was then a canal, when he was 33. Today you can stroll past the baroque portico into its reconstructed period rooms and through a Renaissance garden, and come away with a good idea of the lifestyle of a patrician Flemish gentleman of that era. Examples of Rubens's works, and others by master painters who were his contemporaries, are scattered throughout. In the dining room, look for a self-portrait painted when he was 47 years old, and in another room a portrait of Anthony Van Dyck as a boy. Rubens collected Roman sculpture, and some of the pieces in his sculpture gallery appear—reproduced in amazing detail—in his paintings. Don't just stay

inside the house: The superb, restored ornamental garden from 1615 is well worth a stroll around, and a nice place to take a breather in spring and summer.

Note: Unless you want it as a souvenir, the English guide (2.50€/$3.15) is an unnecessary expense—almost everything in it is listed on placards in the house.

The admission includes entry to the nearby Mayer van dan Bergh Museum, which houses art, tapestries, stained glass, and more, from the Medieval through the Renaissance eras. It isn't spectacular, but it has a nice collection, including a painting by Brueghel, in a 16th-century late Gothic building.

Wapper 9–11 (a short walk east of the center). ✆ **03/201-15-55.** http://museum.antwerpen.be/rubenshuis. Admission 5€ ($6.25) adults, 2.50€ ($3.15) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and their companions and children under 19. Tues–Sun (also Easter Monday, Pentecost Monday) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, and Dec 25–26. Tram: 2, 3, or 15 to Meir; 4, 7, or 8 to Meirbrug/Katelijnevest; 12 or 24 to Frankrijklei.

AROUND THE GROTE MARKT

A lively 16th-century square lined with outdoor cafes and restaurant terraces, the Grote Markt, though not quite as dramatic as Brussels's Grand-Place, is no less the focus of the city's everyday life, and is generally less crowded than the capital's square. The fountain in the center recalls the legend of Druon and Brabo (see earlier in this chapter).

Stadhuis (City Hall) ★ The Renaissance City Hall, designed by Cornelius Floris and built from 1561 to 1565, is an outstanding example of the Flemish mannerism that replaced the formerly supreme Gothic style. It was burned down by the Spanish in 1576 and rebuilt as you see it now. Look for the frescoes by Leys, an important 19th-century painter; some interesting murals; and in the burgomaster's chamber, an impressive 16th-century fireplace.

Grote Markt. ✆ **03/221-13-33.** Guided tours 1€ ($1.25). Mon–Wed and Fri–Sat 11am, 2pm, and 3pm (council business permitting).

Vleeshuis (Butcher's Hall) Around the square and in the surrounding streets are excellent examples of 16th-century guild houses. One worth a visit is this magnificent Gothic structure. A short walk from the Stadhuis, it now functions as a museum of archaeology, ceramics, arms, religious art, sculpture, musical instruments, coins, and medieval furnishings. The collections give a good general idea of daily life in Antwerp during the 16th century, as do the historical paintings (look for the striking *The Spanish Fury,* picturing Antwerp's darkest hour). There's also an Egyptian section.

Vleeshouwersstraat 38–40. ✆ **03/233-64-04.** http://museum.antwerpen.be/vleeshuis. Admission 2€ ($2.50) adults, 1.25€ ($1.55) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and their companions and children under 19. Tues–Sun (also Easter Monday, Pentecost Monday) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, and Dec 25–26.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

De Steen ★ Always referred to simply as "The Steen," this medieval fortress on the banks of the Scheldt dates from the early 13th century, making this Antwerp's oldest building, and still exhibits Romanesque traces. You can walk into the courtyard even when the museum is closed. The glowering fortress has served a number of purposes over the centuries. Today it houses the **Nationaal Scheepvaartmuseum (National Maritime Museum)** ★★. There's an extensive library on river navigation and almost every nautical subject, as well as exhibits about the development of the port and maritime history in general. The most eye-catching are models of old-time sailing ships, like those of the Belgian East

India Company clippers. Next to the museum there's an interesting industrial archaeological division with the remains of the old Antwerp port; this division is open Easter to November 1.

Steenplein 1 (at the Scheldt River). ✆ **03/201-93-40.** http://museum.antwerpen.be/scheepvaartmuseum. Admission 4€ ($5) adults, 2€ ($2.50) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and their companions and children under 19. Tues–Sun (also Easter Monday, Pentecost Monday) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, and Dec 25–26. Métro: Groenplaats.

MoMu Based on the collection of the shuttered Textile and Costume Museum Vrieselhof, the exhibits of the Antwerp Fashion Museum consist of clothing, lace, embroidery, fabrics, and tools for textile processing dating back to the 16th century, complemented with pieces by contemporary Belgian designers. MoMu aims to combine a varied-exhibits policy, with publications, a scientific library and spacious public reading room, lectures, conferences, workshops, and movies. The location of MoMu ties in closely with this vision. Together with the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI) and the renowned fashion department of the Antwerp Royal Academy of Fine Arts, MoMu is housed in the beautifully restored 19th-century ModeNatie building, in the cultural and historic center of town.

Nationalestraat 28 (at Drukkerijstraat). ✆ **03/470-27-70.** www.momu.be. Admission 6€ ($7.50) adults; 4€ ($5) students, seniors, and children 12–18; free for children under 12e. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm (1st and 3rd Thurs of month 9pm). Closed Jan 1, July 21, Aug 15, and Dec 25. Tram: 2 or 8.

Plantin-Moretus Museum In 1555 Christoffle Plantin established an influential printing workshop in this stately patrician mansion in the city center. Its output included an astonishing multilanguage (Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Aramaic) edition of the Bible and translations of other great works of literature. Plantin's name survives in today's publishing world as a widely used typeface. His grandson, Balthasar Moretus, was a contemporary and close friend of Rubens, who illustrated many of the books published by the Plantin-Moretus workshop and who painted the family portraits you see displayed here, along with panel paintings that include *The Dying Seneca* (1616). The museum's exhibits include an antique *Librorium Prohibitorum,* a catalog of books proscribed by the church as being unfit for pious consumption.

Vrijdagmarkt 22. ✆ **03/221-14-50.** http://museum.antwerpen.be/plantin_moretus. Admission 4€ ($5) adults, 2€ ($2.50) seniors, free for visitors with disabilities and their companions and children under 19. Tues–Sun (also Easter Monday, Pentecost Monday) 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1–2, May 1, Ascension Day, Nov 1–2, and Dec 25–26.

Sint-Jacobskerk (St. James's Church) This flamboyant Gothic church with a baroque interior is the final resting place of Peter Paul Rubens. His vault is in the Rubens Chapel, one of seven chapels bordering the opulent semicircular ambulatory behind the high altar. Several of Rubens's works are here, as well as some by Van Dyck and other prominent artists. Rubens is joined in his eternal slumber by a glittering collection of Antwerp's one-time high and mighty, and by a glittering collection of gold and silver and religious objects.

Lange Nieuwstraat 73–75 (a short walk east of the city center, north of the Rubens House). ✆ **03/225-04-14.** www.topa.be. Admission 2€ ($2.50) adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) students, free for children under 12. Apr–Oct daily 2–5pm; Nov–Mar Wed–Mon 2–5pm. Closed to tourist visits during services.

Zoo Antwerpen *Kids* This fine (but by no means inexpensive) 10-hectare (25-acre) zoo, which has been here since 1843, is a great place to take the kids. Its large collection of animals from around the world roam through spaces bounded for the most part by artificial reproductions of natural barriers. There's

an aquarium, winter garden, Egyptian temple (which houses elephants), anthropoid house, museum of natural history, deer parks, Kongo peacock habitat, and planetarium. The zoo is something of an Art Nouveau masterpiece, though whether or not the animals appreciate this is hard to tell.

Koningin Astridplein 26 (just east of Centraal Station). ✆ **03/202-45-40.** www.zooantwerpen.be. Admission 14€ ($18) adults, 9.50€ ($12) seniors and children 3–11, free for children under 3. Daily from 10am; closing time: Nov–Feb 4:45pm; Mar–Apr and Oct 5.30pm; May–June and Sept 6pm; July–Aug 7pm. Métro: Centraal Station.

ANTWERP'S PORT

The city's prime location just above the point where the river meets the Scheldt Estuary made it an important Gallo-Roman port in the 2nd century B.C. For many centuries after that, Antwerp attracted a bevy of covetous invaders. Antwerp was a trading station of the powerful medieval Hanseatic League, but unlike Bruges, did not have the status of a full-fledged league *Kontor.*

In the port's early days, ships moored at the city itself. But the Scheldt is a tidal river, with a depth that varies twice daily from 9m (30 ft.) to 14m (45 ft.). Nowadays the port has moved 13km (8 miles) downstream to the huge excavated Zandvliet docks that jam up against the Dutch border, protected by tidal rise and fall by a series of locks. Napoleon began the process of transformation in 1806—he viewed Antwerp as a "pistol aimed at the heart of England"—and 5 years later the first vessel moored in the Bonaparte Dock.

The port is well worth a visit, if only to appreciate its vast size. The entire harbor/dock complex covers 65 sq. km (40 sq. miles). Each year 16,000 ships visit, transporting 100 million metric tons of cargo. Port enterprises employ 57,000 people and add more than $6 billion to the national economy. You'll soon understand why an age-old local saying is that "Antwerp has God to thank for the Scheldt, and the Scheldt for everything else."

The Flandria boat cruises and coach tours (see "Organized Tours" below) offer the best view, but the tourist office can also furnish detailed information for those who wish to drive the plainly marked Havenroute (if this includes you, keep a sharp eye out for the hazards of this busy workplace, such as open bridges, rail tracks, moving cranes, and so on).

THE DIAMOND QUARTER

The raw facts and figures are sparkling enough: Some 85% of the world's rough diamonds, 50% of cut diamonds, and 40% of industrial diamonds are traded here annually—together they're valued at more than $12.5 billion and account for roughly 7% of total Belgian exports. The diamond cutters of Antwerp are world-renowned for their skill, which you can admire in the Diamond Quarter, a surprisingly down-at-heels-looking area, only steps away from Centraal Station. More than 12,000 expert cutters and polishers are at work in the Diamond Quarter, at 380 workshops, serving 1,500 firms and 3,500 brokers and merchants. The

Port in a Storm

The maritime approaches to Antwerp harbor are all through Dutch territory, and they need to be constantly dredged if it is to continue handling deep-draught vessels. In this solitary instance, the Dutch, whose dredging skills are world-renowned, are slow and unenthusiastic practitioners of the art. But to hear them tell it, this has nothing to do with keeping Rotterdam's nose ahead of Antwerp's in a competitive world.

trade is supervised by Antwerp's Hoge Raad voor Diamant (Diamond High Council).

Many dealers and traders belong to the city's Orthodox Jewish community, which has a long tradition of handling diamonds and is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a reticent group. But the business is becoming ever more multinational, with Indians another prominent group. A code of honor and trust underlies business. Even today, when e-commerce is a fact of international business life, most deals in Antwerp are still sealed with a handshake.

There's a downside to the trade. Miners and gleaners—many of them children—in Africa and Asia might be paid just a dollar a day for their labor. And so-called conflict diamonds are fueling wars and internal conflicts on those continents.

In addition to perusing the stores and visiting a workshop (see "Shopping" below), a good place to get close to the city's diamond trade is the **Diamantmuseum Provincie Antwerpen (Antwerp Province Diamond Museum),** Koningin Astridplein 19–23 (✆ **03/202-48-90;** www.diamantmuseum.be; Métro: Centraal Station). Exhibits here trace the history, geology, mining, and cutting of diamonds. Diamond-cutting and -polishing demonstrations are on Saturday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30pm. The museum is open Thursday to Tuesday from 10am to 5:30pm. Admission is 6€ ($7.50) for adults, 4€ ($5) for seniors and visitors ages 12 to 26, and free for children under 12.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Close to Antwerp Zoo (see above) and working in cooperation with it, another great attraction for kids is **Aquatopia** ★, Koningin Astridplein 7 (✆ **03/205-07-40;** www.aquatopia.be; Métro: Centraal Station), which opened its doors in 2003 in the Astrid Park Plaza Hotel building, just across the square from Centraal Station. The futuristic facility's 40 aquaria, set on three floors, are together filled with around a million liters (264,200 gal.) of salt water, and house some than 3,500 marine creatures, ranging from sea horses to sharks. Tropical rainforests, mangroves, wetlands, coral reefs, the ocean floor—all, and more, are featured. No doubt the biggest thrill will come from walking through the clear-walled "shark tunnel," while watching smallish examples of these toothy denizens of the deep swimming around you. Multimedia applications and interactive computer displays complement the live action; even Nemo puts in an appearance. If you're visiting with children, you may want to spend at least 2 hours here. Aquatopia is open daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission is 9.45€ ($12) for adults, 7.45€ ($9.30) for seniors and students, 4.95€ ($5.20) for visitors with disabilities, and 6.45€ ($8.05) for children under 12.

ORGANIZED TOURS

WALKING TOURS From July to September a daily guided tour of the city center, in English (and French), departs at 2pm from the tourist office; the cost is 5€ ($6.25) for adults and 2.50€ ($3.15) for accompanied children under 12. The tourist office can also arrange for a qualified guide to accompany you on private walking tours around the city at a set rate of 50€ ($63) for the first 2 hours and 25€ ($31) for each additional hour. There are also clearly marked self-guided walks, with brochures available from the tourist office.

BY BOAT Do take a cruise around Antwerp's awesome harbor, which handles 16,000 ships and 100 million tons of cargo a year. Most departures are from the Steen waterfront on the Scheldt. **Flandria Line** (✆ **03/231-31-00**) runs a 2½-hour harbor cruise for 13€ ($16) for adults and 7€ ($8.75) for children. In July and August there's a delightful harbor dinner cruise from 8 to 10:30pm, for 50€

($63) for adults and 30€ ($38) for children. A 50-minute excursion on the river is less interesting, but still worthwhile, with half-hourly departures during summer months, costing 7€ ($8.75) for adults and 4€ ($5) for children.

BY BUS The **Antwerp Diamond Bus** is a double-decker bus that tours the city's main tourist areas and sights on a regular circuit. You can hop on and hop off at various points on the tour. Tickets, valid for 24 hours, are 10€ ($13) for adults, 9€ ($11) for seniors and students, and 5€ ($6.25) for children.

5 Shopping

Antwerp yields not an inch to Brussels in the style wars—in fact, Antwerp is by far the more fashion conscious of the two. During the 1980s and 1990s, youthful local fashion designers, graduates of the city's Fine Arts Academy, made a major and enduring impact within Belgium and established a substantial international reputation.

Expensive, upmarket stores, boutiques, and department stores abound in De Keyserlei and the Meir. For haute couture, go to Leopoldstraat; for lace, the streets surrounding the cathedral; for books, Hoogstraat; for electronics and antiques, Minderbroedersrui; and for diamonds, Appelmansstraat and nearby streets, all near Centraal Station.

WHERE TO SHOP

A top Belgian fashion designer keeps shop at **Ann Demeulemeester's** ★★, Verlatstraat 38 (✆ **03/216-01-33;** tram: 8 to Leopold de Waelplaats), in front of the Royal Fine Arts Museum. Demeulemeester, one of the "Antwerp Six," turned down an offer from Naomi Campbell to model her clothes on the grounds that Campbell, though admittedly beautiful, was glamorous rather than elegant. This is the only place in the world where you can buy her complete lines of clothes, shoes, and accessories for both men and women. Space for displaying them is not a problem at this former seaman's academy, a 19th-century listed building. It's open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 7pm.

Treat your feet to shoes by Anne Demeulemeester and top Flemish designers Dries Van Noten and Dirk Bikkembergs at **Coccodrillo,** Schuttershofstraat 9A (✆ **03/233-20-93**). **Gozo,** Steenhouwersvest 63 (✆ **03/226-24-58**), serves up chic, affordable women's fashions, including Belgian designer Olivier Strelli's moderately priced 22 Octobre line.

For diamonds, visit the glittering jewelry and gold stores of the **Diamond Quarter,** around Centraal Station. At **Diamondland,** Appelmansstraat 33A (✆ **03/229-29-90;** www.diamondland.be; Métro: Centraal Station), it's fascinating to watch expert cutters and polishers transform undistinguished stones into gems of glittering beauty—the "Antwerp cut" is said to give them more sparkle. This luxurious showplace, the city's biggest, provides a firsthand look at the process on a guided tour of its workrooms, and you can take home a souvenir of lasting value for a price considerably lower than you'd pay elsewhere (tax-free for residents of countries outside the European Union). The shop is open during regular business hours Monday to Saturday, and also on Sunday and holidays April to October.

Get in touch with your inner child at **Piet Konijn,** Steenhouwersvest 42 (✆ **03/226-84-07**), where many of the toys are made from wood and don't blink, bleep, or run out of battery juice.

English-language books are available from **FNAC,** Groenplaats 31 (✆ **03/231-2056**), and **Standaard,** Huidevetterstraat 57 (✆ **03/231-0773**).

MARKETS

Antwerp's famed street markets are fun as well as good bargain-hunting territory. If you're in town on a Saturday from April till September, shop for a steal (that'll be the day) at the **Antiques Market,** Lijnwaadmarkt, Saturday from Easter to October 10am to 6pm. The outstanding **Bird Market** is a general market that features live animals, plants, textiles, and foodstuffs; it takes place Sunday mornings in Oude Vaartplaats near the City Theater. At the **Friday Market,** on Wednesday and Friday mornings on Vrijdagmarkt facing the Plantin-Moretus Museum, household goods and secondhand furniture are put on public auction.

6 Antwerp After Dark

Antwerp is as lively after dark as it is busy during the day. To check what's going on while you're in the city, pick up a copy of *Antwerpen,* a monthly publication available at the tourist office. You can get information about and purchase tickets for concerts, theater, and other cultural events from **Prospekta,** Grote Markt 13, 2000 Antwerpen (✆ **03/203-95-85;** fax 03/203-95-97; www.prospekta.be). The desk is in the same building as Antwerp tourist office's main office and is open the same hours (see "Visitor Information" earlier in this chapter).

Main entertainment areas are Grote Markt and Groenplaats, which both contain concentrations of bars, cafes, and theaters; High Town (Hoogstraat, Pelgrimstraat, Pieter Potstraat, and vicinity) for jazz clubs and bistros; Stadswaag for jazz and punk; and the Centraal Station area for discos, nightclubs, and gay bars. The red-light district here, concentrated in Riverside Quarter, is much seedier and less tourist-oriented than the one that's a big visitor attraction just a few hours drive up the road in Amsterdam, in neighboring Holland.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Antwerp takes pride in being a citadel of Flemish culture. Two of the region's stellar companies are based here: the **Vlaamse Opera (Flanders Opera),** Frankrijklei 3 (✆ **03/233-66-85**), and the **Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen (Royal Flanders Ballet),** Kattendijkdok-Westkaai 16 (✆ **03/234-34-38**).

To house its vibrant cultural life, the city has no shortage of performance venues. Top of the line for theater and classical music is the **Stadsschouwburg,** Theaterplein 1 (✆ **03/227-03-06**). For music and ballet, there's the classically orientated **Koningin Elisabethzaal,** Koningin Astridplein 23–24 (✆ **03/203-56-00**); and the more modernist **deSingel,** Desguinlei 25 (✆ **03/248-28-28**).

Antwerp has more theaters than any other Flemish city, as well as two excellent theater companies: **Jeugdtheater** and **KNS,** the Royal Flemish Theater. Though most plays are in Dutch, you can often understand the plot regardless of language difficulties, and the quality of these shows merits attendance. For current information and reservations, contact the **Cultural Information Desk,** Grote Markt 40 (✆ **03/220-81-11**).

MUSIC CLUBS

Along De Keyserlei and its side streets, there's a conglomeration of disco and strip bars—some very classy, others (obvious at a glance) frankly smutty or vulgar. If you're looking for a respectable disco, check the area between Groenplaats and Grote Markt. Look out for **De Blokhut,** Lange Herentalsestraat 6 (✆ **03/226-90-79**); **Le Caveau,** Frankrijklei 18 (✆ **03/231-53-42**); **Griffy's,** De Keyserlei 19–21 (✆ **03/233-19-22**); **Hans Christian Andersen,** De Keyserlei 25 (✆ **03/226-48-63**); and **Café d'Anvers,** Verversrui 15 (✆ **03/226-38-70**).

Tips The Belgian Muppets

Take the kids to the delightful **Van Campen Royal Puppet Theater,** Lange Nieuwstraat 3 (✆ **03/237-37-16**), where the plot lines are always easy to understand (even if the language isn't).

BARS

Antwerp just about bursts at the seams with great bars. When the sun goes down, the people of Antwerp head for their favorite cafe or bar for an evening of Belgian beer and good conversation—and you'll be very welcome to join their circle. If you don't spend an evening in this manner, it's safe to say that you haven't really seen Antwerp! Street cafes are generally found in Groenplaats and Grote Markt; "brown cafes" (traditional pubs) and bistros are clustered on Hoogstraat, Pelgrimstraat, Pieter Potstraat, and the surroundings; beer cellars are on Stadswaag; taverns and boulevard cafes are strewn along De Keyserlei; artists' cafes and bars are in Quartier Latin near the City Theater; and gay bars are mostly in the Centraal Station area.

No city watering hole has a better outlook than **De Engel** ★, Grote Markt 3 (✆ **03/233-12-52**), an old-style cafe in the main square, beside the fountain-sculpture of Silvius Brabo, where a *bolleke* (little ball) of Antwerp's very own De Koninck beer becomes a work of liquid art. **Paeters Vaetje,** Blauwmoezelstraat 1 (✆ **03/231-84-76**), below the cathedral's soaring spire, is a great place for listening to the Monday evening carillon concert, and serves up 100 different brews. Get the abbey habit at **De Groote Witte Arend (The Great White Eagle),** Reyndersstraat 12–18 (✆ **03/226-31-90**), a cafe in a 17th-century former monastery, where customers are serenaded by classical music. Go underground to **De Pelgrom,** Pelgrimstraat 15 (✆ **03/234-08-09**), in a candlelit, brick-arched cellar, where you can get convivial at long wood benches. A huge selection of beer, including virtually every Belgian brand, is displayed behind glass and served at candlelit tables in **Kulminator,** Vleminckveld 32 (✆ **03/232-45-38**). Hot and cool at the same time, **Het Zottekot,** Vlaamse Kaai 21 (✆ **03/237-99-07**), a wide step away from old-Antwerp style, is a wild, youth-oriented den where anything can happen—and generally does.

An altogether different kind of drinking experience is to be had at **De Vagant** ★, Reyndersstraat 25 (✆ **03/233-15-38**). It deals exclusively in *jenever,* and has 220 varieties of this stiff grain spirit. An upstairs restaurant specializes in dishes with *jenever*-based sauces and its walls are a gallery of *jenever* memorabilia.

7 Side Trips from Antwerp

Antwerp's most scenic hinterland is the Kempen moorland that stretches east of the city, along the Dutch border.

LIER

16km (10 miles) SE of Antwerp

A pretty, small town on the banks of the Nete River, Lier (Lierre in French) has canalside scenes reminiscent of Bruges.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Trains for Lier depart hourly from Antwerp Centraal Station (see Antwerp "Getting There" earlier in this chapter). There are buses every

half-hour or so from the bus station in front of Centraal Station, but they take longer. To go by car, take N10.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Lier,** Stadhuis (Town Hall), Grote Markt 57 (✆ **03/488-38-88;** fax 03/488-12-76; www.lier.be).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Don't miss the town's **Zimmertoren (Zimmer Tower)** ★, Zimmerplein (✆ **03/491-13-95**), which dates from the 14th century. It's equipped with the remarkable Centenary Clock and Wonder Clock, which were installed by astronomy enthusiast Lodewijk Zimmer to explain "Life, the Universe, and Everything" to his fellow citizens. The clocks show the sun, moon, signs of the zodiac, seasons, tides on the River Nete, and, quite possibly, tomorrow's movements on Wall Street. The tower is open daily in July and August from 9am to noon and 1 to 6pm; the rest of the year it closes at 4pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults and 1€ ($1.25) for children.

If you have time, visit also the **Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum),** Florent van Cauwenberghstraat 14 (✆ **03/491-13-96**), just off of the Grote Markt in the town center. Its art collection includes paintings by Rubens, Jan and Pieter Brueghel, David Teniers the Younger, and local artist Isidore Opsomer. The museum is open April to October, Saturday to Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to noon and 1:30 to 5:30pm. Admission is 2€ ($2.50) for adults and 1€ ($1.25) for children.

HASSELT

77km (48 miles) SE of Antwerp

The heart of Belgium's potent *jenever* industry, Hasselt is a center for touring the eastern reaches of the Kempen moorland.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The town is easily reached by hourly train from Antwerp, or by a leisurely drive east on N10 and N2 (see Antwerp "Essentials" earlier in this chapter).

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Hasselt** is at Lombaardstraat 3 (✆ **011/23-95-40;** fax 011/22-50-23; www.hasselt.be).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Centuries of the loving care devoted to the fiery drink *jenever* are recalled in the exhibits of the **Nationaal Jenevermuseum (National Jenever Museum),** Witte Nonnenstraat 19 (✆ **011/24-11-44**). These include its distillation, bottling, labeling, and, of course, drinking. The *jenever* has the last word in a free sample that rounds the visit off with an appropriate glow of gratitude. The museum is open April to October, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm; November to March, Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. Admission is 3€ ($3.75) for adults, 1€ ($1.25) for children ages 12 to 18, and free for children under 12.

A nearby attraction, which is especially interesting for children, is the **Domein Bokrijk (Bokrijk Estate)** ★★ (✆ **011/26-53-00**), 8km (5 miles) northeast of town. On the grounds of the big wooded estate is the **Openluchtmuseum (Open-Air Museum),** consisting of old houses that provide detailed reconstructions of everyday Flemish life in premodern times. In some, craftspeople work at traditional trades, creating the illusion that you've been transported back to a simpler age easier to sustain. Although all of the buildings and village sites are clearly marked, I suggest you buy the English-language guide,

which is an education in itself. In addition, the estate incorporates a big nature reserve. The museum is open April to September daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission Monday to Saturday is 6€ ($7.50) for adults, 5€ ($6.25) for seniors, 3€ ($3.75) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6; Sunday 7€ ($8.75) for adults, 6€ ($7.50) for seniors, 4€ ($5) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6. There is regular bus service from Hasselt, and train service from Brussels via Hasselt (Bokrijk has its own rail station). By car, take N75 from Hasselt.

TONGEREN

88km (55 miles) SE of Antwerp

Belgium's oldest town (*Tongres* in French), with a history dating back to Roman times, is at the eastern end of the Kempen moorland, close to the Dutch border. Ambiorix, chief of the ancient Eburones, whipped one of Julius Caesar's legions here in 54 B.C., earning himself a martial statue on the town's Grote Markt.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE There is frequent **train** service from Antwerp to Tongeren via Hasselt. By **car,** take N20 southeast from Hasselt.

VISITOR INFORMATION **Toerisme Tongeren,** Stadhuisplein 9, 3700 Tongeren (✆ **012/39-02-55;** fax 012/39-11-43; www.tongeren.be), is open April to September, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm; October to March, Monday to Friday from 9:30 to noon and 1 to 4:30pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Tongeren is home to the imposing **Onze-Lieve-Vrouwebasiliek (Basilica of Our Lady)** ★, a Gothic church with a Brabantine tower and a Romanesque cloister. Its rich *schatkamer* (treasury) contains rare religious objects from the Merovingian era (6th–8th c. A.D.) up to the 18th century. The basilica is open daily from 9am to 4pm (the treasury Apr–Sept). Admission to the basilica is free; to the treasury 2.50€ ($3.15) for adults, 1.50€ ($1.90) for seniors, students, and children ages 12 to 18, .50€ (65¢) for children ages 5 to 12, and free for children under 5.

Also worth a visit is the **Gallo-Romeins Museum (Gallo-Roman Museum)** ★, Kielenstraat 15 (✆ **012/67-03-33**), which contains 18,000 artifacts from prehistory through the Roman and Merovingian periods. The Roman period, when the town was known as Atuatuca Tungrorum, is especially well represented, and includes huge and important collections of relics from its cemetery and the surrounding countryside. From the province of Limburg alone, there are collections of Roman-era pottery, glassware, bronze articles, terra cotta, and sculptures. These are organized by theme to illustrate everyday life both in the country and in the city, and include exhibits on religious practices and traditions. The museum is open Monday from noon to 5pm, Tuesday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. It's closed on January 1 and December 25. Admission is 5€ ($6.25) for adults, 2€ ($2.50) for seniors and students, 1.25€ ($1.55) for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6.

Appendix A: Brussels, Bruges, Ghent & Antwerp in Depth

History, art, and fine food—a convincing case could be made for the proposition that few places on earth have these attributes in the quantity and quality claimed by the four cities that are the pride and joy of Flanders. There's plenty more to all four, of course, which will be good news if your interests tend more toward business, culture, shopping, or entertainment, but you'll find that history, art, and fine food make a pretty good starting point.

1 History 101

Emperors have held court, merchants have made fabulous fortunes, and great artists have changed the world's image of itself, all in Flanders, a tiny corner of northwest Europe that has almost nothing in the way of natural resources—other than the natural resourcefulness of its people.

EARLY DAYS

Between 57 and 51 B.C., the Roman general Julius Caesar conquered the territory in northern Gaul that now comprises the Belgian region of Flanders, defeating the Celtic Belgae tribes that were its then owners. There's not much sign that the land on which these four notable cities would develop contained anything more than muddy scrapes on the low-lying fields of Flanders. The great Roman centers of Belgium were the towns of Tornacum (Tournai) and Atuatuca Tungrorum (Tongeren). Of Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, nary a Latin word is spoken, though there is a legend that Antwerp's name came

Dateline

- **1st century B.C.** Celtic tribes settle the Flemish coastal plain.
- **58 B.C.** Julius Caesar leads Roman legions against Belgae tribes.
- **1st century A.D.** A Gallo-Roman settlement occupies the site of what will become Bruges.
- **8th century** In Ghent the first abbeys are founded. The monk St. Eloy refers to a Flemish town called the Municipium Flandrense, which appears to be the first documented reference to Bruges.
- **843** Treaty of Verdun splits off most of Flanders from what will later become the Walloon provinces.
- **ca. 850** A fort is built in Bruges to provide a defense against the Vikings.
- **861** Count Baldwin "Iron Arm" of Flanders elopes with the king of France's daughter.
- **864** The name "Bruggia" appears for the first time on coins.
- **ca. 940** Count Arnulf I builds the Church of St. Donatian in Bruges.
- **966** The first documented reference to Brussels calls it *Bruocsella,* meaning Settlement in the Marsh.

Impressions

Of all the peoples of Gaul, the Belgians are the bravest.

—Julius Caesar, *The Commentaries*

from the hand of a pesky giant, cut off and thrown *(handwerpen)* into the Scheldt (Schelde) River by a Roman centurion.

But when you come right down to it, if there were no Scheldt River, there would be no Antwerp by any name. Its prime location just before the point where the River Scheldt meets the tidal Scheldt Estuary made it a Gallo-Roman port in the 2nd century B.C., and it has attracted a bevy of covetous invaders in the centuries since then. In those days of the 2nd century, the ships tied up beside the city center; nowadays the port has moved downstream to the huge excavated docks that jam up against the Dutch border.

You need to fast-forward to the Middle Ages, before the four cities make their first appearance on history's stage. From the beginning of the 5th century, Roman rule gave way to the Franks, who held sway for nearly 200 years. In the year 800, the great Charlemagne was named Emperor of the West; he instituted an era of agricultural reform, setting up underling local rulers known as counts. In 814, after Charlemagne's death, these counts rose up to seize more power. By 843 Charlemagne's son had acceded to the Treaty of Verdun, which split the empire of the Franks in three and attached Flanders west of the Scheldt to France.

Then came the Viking invaders, who attacked the northern provinces. A Flemish defender known as Baldwin Iron-Arm became the first Count of Flanders in 862; his royal house eventually ruled over a domain that included the Netherlands and lands as far south as the Scheldt (Escaut) in France. From the beginning of Antwerp's recorded history in the 7th century until the 14th century, the city and its port suffered invasion by the Norse.

Ghent had already been on the scene since the 7th century, with the founding of an abbey by St. Amand

- **977** A castle is constructed on the island of St-Géry, on the site of what will become Brussels.
- **979** Duke Charles of Lotharingia (Lorraine) moves into the castle. This is now considered Brussels's foundation date.
- **1096** Count Robert II of Flanders is among the military leaders of the first Crusade.
- **End 11th century** Bruges's short-lived period as a maritime trading center ends with the silting of its outlet to the sea.
- **1127** After the murder of Count Charles the Good in Bruges, the town receives its first charter from his successor, Count Thierry of Alsace.
- **1134** A North Sea storm creates the Zwin inlet, reopening a passage to the sea for Bruges.
- **1150** The Relic of the Holy Blood is brought to Bruges.
- **1204** After the Fourth Crusade's capture and sack of the Byzantine capital Constantinople, Count Baldwin IX of Flanders (1171–1205) is appointed Emperor Baldwin I of the Latin Empire of Constantinople.
- **1302** At the "Battle of the Golden Spurs" near Kortrijk, an army of Flemish peasants defeats the French and kills many noble-born knights. But 3 years later France regains control.
- **1337** Ghent rebels against French rule.
- **1376** Construction of Bruges's Town Hall begins.
- **1384** Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, gains control of Flanders.
- **15th century** Era of "Flemish Primitives"—artists Jan van Eyck, Hieronymous Bosch, Rogier van der Weyden, and Hans Memling.
- **1402** Construction of Brussels's Gothic Town Hall begins.
- **1425** The prestigious Catholic University of Leuven is founded.
- **1430** Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy founds the Order of the Golden Fleece in Bruges.
- **1432** Jan van Eyck paints *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb.*
- **1482** The Austrian Habsburg Empire takes over Flanders and the rest of the Low Countries.

continues

on the future site of Ghent, and its importance grew when Count Baldwin I established a fortress there in around 867, at the same time that Bruges was being founded. St. Amand seems to have had a hand in the founding of Antwerp too, by building a church at a riverside settlement that probably already existed in the 2nd century. Brussels was the laggard of the quartet, its founding being attributed to Duke Charles of Lorraine, who built a castle at a settlement on the site in 979.

Always a buffer between warring political factions, the region nevertheless provided a ready market for England's wool, which its weavers transformed into the Flemish cloth so highly prized in Europe and much of the medieval world—it's the cloth you see draping the figures depicted in the great paintings of the Middle Ages. In the process, the access of Bruges to the sea made it the busiest port in northwest Europe, and the cloth mills of Ghent set an industrial pattern still obvious today.

As Flanders grew larger and stronger, its cities thrived, and its citizens wrested more and more self-governing powers. Bruges (Brugge) emerged as a leading center of European trade; its monopoly on English cloth attracted bankers and financiers from Germany and Lombardy. No one could have foreseen that Bruges's fine link to the sea, the Zwin inlet, would eventually choke with silt and leave the city high and dry, landlocked. Ghent (Gent) and Ypres (Ieper) prospered in the wool trade. Powerful trade and manufacturing guilds emerged and erected splendid edifices as their headquarters.

Bruges's merchants traded in salted Baltic herring, Norwegian salted or dried cod and cod-liver oil, German beer and salt, bales of linen and woolen cloth from the Low Countries and England, Russian furs and candle wax, Polish grain and flour, and Swedish

- **1500** The future Habsburg Emperor Charles V is born in Ghent.
- **1506** Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child* is installed in Bruges's Church of Our Lady.
- **1520** Silting of the Zwin inlet closes Bruges's outlet to the sea.
- **1521** The humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam takes up residence at Anderlecht, a village outside Brussels.
- **1531** Brussels is the capital of the Spanish Low Countries.
- **1555** Philip II of Spain introduces Catholic Inquisition persecution against Protestants.
- **1561** Completion of the Willebroek Canal that links Brussels to the Scheldt River, and by way of Antwerp to the North Sea.
- **1566** Protestant rioters sack Catholic churches in what is known as the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury).
- **1567** Philip II of Spain sends the Duke of Alba to the Low Countries to confront the Protestant Reformation.
- **1568** Counts Egmont and Hoorn are beheaded on the Grand-Place in Brussels for protesting the excesses of the Inquisition.
- **1569** Death of the artist Pieter Brueghel the Elder.
- **1576** Spanish troops capture and sack Antwerp, an episode recalled as the "Spanish Fury." The Pacification of Ghent, a treaty that establishes freedom of worship in the Low Countries, is signed, but is soon proved to be worthless.
- **1585** Spanish blockade of the Scheldt plunges Antwerp into a steep decline.
- **1608** Peter Paul Rubens is appointed court painter to the Spanish governor.
- **1622** A canal from Bruges to Ostend opens.
- **1695** Bombardment and destruction of Brussels's Grand-Place by the French.
- **1713** Spanish Netherlands (including Belgium) comes under rule of Hapsburgs of Austria.
- **1795** French rule of Belgium begins.
- **1815** Napoleon defeated at Waterloo. Belgium becomes part of the Netherlands. Brussels is a co-equal seat of the House of Orange, along with The Hague.

timber and iron. They expanded this lucrative trade by joining the powerful Baltic-based Hanseatic League, and the city's merchants grew rich on the contents of the warehouses they built along the canals.

As cities took on city-state status, the mighty count of Flanders, with close ties to France, grew less and less mighty; in 1297, France's Philip the Fair made a bold attempt to annex Flanders. However, he had not reckoned on the stubborn resistance of Flemish common folk. Led by the likes of Jan Breydel, a lowly weaver, and Pieter de Coninck, a butcher, both from Bruges, they rallied to face a heavily armored French military. The battle took place on July 11, 1302, in the fields surrounding Kortrijk. When it was over, victorious artisans and craftsmen scoured the bloody battlefield, triumphantly gathering hundreds of golden spurs from slain French knights. Their victory at the "Battle of the Golden Spurs" is celebrated to this day by the Flemish.

But this valiant resistance was crushed by 1328, and Flanders suffered under both the French and the English during the course of the ensuing Hundred Years' War. After numerous small-scale struggles for control during the 14th and 15th centuries, the House of Burgundy became the first major feudal power in the Low Countries, consolidating its hold on the region by acquiring fiefdoms one by one through the various means of marriage, inheritance, and military force. When Philip the Good—duke of Burgundy in the mid-1400s and ally of England's King Henry V—gained control of virtually all the Low Countries, he was able to quell political troubles in Ghent and Bruges. His progeny, through a series of advantageous marriages, managed to consolidate their holdings into a single Burgundian "Netherlands." Brussels, Antwerp, Mechelen, and Leuven

- **1830** Belgian War of Independence breaks out.
- **1831** Belgium becomes a constitutional monarchy headed by King Leopold I.
- **1835** The Continent's first railway, between Brussels and Mechelen, opens.
- **1847** Hunger riots erupt in Bruges. In Brussels, the Galeries Royales St-Hubert shopping arcade opens.
- **1904** Construction of Zeebrugge harbor is completed.
- **1914–18** German forces invade Belgium and occupy most of the country during World War I.
- **1940** King Leopold III surrenders Belgium to Germany at outset of World War II.
- **1944** Brussels liberated September 3 by the British Guards Armored Division.
- **1945** World War II ends.
- **1958** The Atomium is the star of the World Fair in Brussels.
- **1959** Brussels becomes the seat of the European Commission.
- **1967** NATO shifts its headquarters from Paris to Brussels.
- **1971** Constitutional reforms are introduced, granting some regional autonomy.
- **1979** Brussels celebrates its millennium.
- **1993** King Baudouin dies; he is succeeded by his brother, Albert II (b. 1934). Constitution is amended to create a federal state composed of the autonomous regions of Flanders and Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital.
- **1996** The nation reacts with horror to the deaths of four girls (two children and two teens), kidnapped by an alleged pedophile ring. Two other children are rescued by police following their kidnap and sexual assault, and the names of other missing children are linked to the ring. Mass street demonstrations—the "White Marches"—take place in Brussels, amid allegations of police and official incompetence and cover-ups.
- **2000** Brussels is European Capital of Culture.

continues

attained new prominence as centers of trade, commerce, learning, and the arts.

This era was one of immense wealth, much of which was poured into fine public buildings, impressive mansions, and soaring Gothic cathedrals that survive to this day. The growing cities bustled in many ways. Traders and craftspeople of all sorts began setting up protectionist guilds, and there was an increase in interest in the arts and sciences. During the 15th century, wealthy patrons made possible the brilliant works of such Flemish artists as Jan van Eyck, Hieronymous Bosch, Rogier van der Weyden, and Hans Memling.

By the end of the 1400s, Charles the Bold, last of the dukes of Burgundy, had lost to the French king on the field of battle, and once more French royalty turned a covetous eye on the Netherlands. Marriage to Mary of Burgundy, the duke's heir, appeared a sure route to bringing the Netherlands under French rule, and a proposal (in reality an ultimatum) was issued to Mary to accept the hand of the French king's eldest son. To the French prince's consternation, Mary promptly wrote a proposal of marriage to Maximilian of Austria. The Austrian's acceptance meant that the provinces became part of the extensive Austrian Hapsburg empire.

A grandson of that union, Charles V—born in Ghent and reared in Mechelen—presided for 40 years over most of Europe, including Spain and its New World possessions. Charles brought prosperity to Antwerp, which outstripped its rival, Bruges, and set up a commercial exchange that was a model for the Royal Exchange in London, and attracted a number of banking princes who brought their counting houses with them.

- **2001** Belgian flag carrier Sabena is declared bankrupt; the new SN Brussels Airlines takes over many of its European routes. Their first child, a daughter named Elisabeth, is born to the heir to the throne Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde.
- **2002** Euro banknotes and coins replace the Belgian franc. Bruges is European Capital of Culture. Sotheby's sells a newly discovered and authenticated painting by Rubens, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (ca. 1610), for $75 million.
- **2003** Belgium's highest court upholds "universal jurisdiction" and rules that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide can be prosecuted in the country, even if the accused isn't Belgian, and the alleged offences took place in another country. The first indictee was Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, followed closely by George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, General Tommy Franks, and Belgian foreign minister Louis Michel. The law was later amended to prevent politically motivated lawsuits.
- **2004** Eight years after a pedophilia scandal that rocked the nation, Belgium's most notorious criminal, Marc Dutroux, is sentenced to life in prison for kidnap, rape, and murder. Belgium's Supreme Court brands the right-wing, nationalist Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) political party—the most popular party in Flanders, say the latest opinion polls, ahead of the Christian Democrats—as racist for its anti-immigrant stance, ruling that freedom of speech takes second place to the nation's tough antiracism laws. The decision costs the Blok 250,000€ ($312,500) in state funding and forces it to disband and reorganize.

WARS OF THE REFORMATION

During the Middle Ages, Flanders was a bastion of Catholicism. The 16th century witnessed the Reformation, which began in 1517 with Martin Luther nailing his *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was a time of tremendous religious ferment. Nations throughout

Gothic Monuments

Examples of great Gothic civic architecture abound in Flanders. The great ecclesiastical examples are St. Michael's Cathedral, in which the choir is the earliest Gothic work in Belgium, and the churches of Our Lady in Mechelen, St. Peter's in Leuven, and St. Bavo's in Ghent. Antwerp Cathedral is perhaps the most imposing example of late Gothic; it was begun in 1352 at the east end and the nave was completed in 1474.

Among the finest examples of commercial Gothic architecture are the Cloth Hall at Ypres (built 1200–1304), the Cloth Hall in Mechelen, the Butchers' Guildhall in Ghent, and the Butchers' Guildhall in Antwerp. Gothic style continued dominant until the early 16th century when Renaissance decorative elements began to appear.

Europe wrestled with the notion of religious diversity. In the Low Countries, the anti-Catholic, iconoclastic ideas of Protestantism took root at the same time as the territory came under the rule of Charles V, and created dissension among the once solidly Catholic populace.

It all proved too much for the great monarch, and so, in 1555 he abdicated in favor of his son, Philip II of Spain. Philip ascended to power in an impressive ceremony at the Palace of the Coudenberg in Brussels in 1555. An ardent Catholic who spoke neither Dutch nor French, he brought the infamous instruments of the Inquisition to bear on an increasingly Protestant—and increasingly rebellious—Spanish Netherlands population. The response from his Protestant subjects was violent: For a month in 1566 they went on a rampage of destruction that became known as the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury) and saw churches pillaged, religious statues smashed, and other religious works of art burned. A League of Protestant Nobles was formed by the taciturn but tactful William of Orange, count of Holland, known also as William the Silent.

Philip's response was to send the zealous duke of Alba to the Low Countries, to lead 10,000 Spanish troops in a wave of retaliatory strikes. He was to function as an overseer, with instructions to enforce the policy of "death to heretics." The atrocities committed by order of Alba and his "Council of Blood" as he swept through the "Spanish Netherlands" are legendary. He was merciless. When the Catholic counts of Egmont and Hornes tried to intercede with Philip, Alba put them under arrest for 6 months, then had them publicly decapitated on the Grand-Place in Brussels.

Antwerp was thoroughly Protestant by this time and the headquarters of William the Silent. That religious persuasion brought down upon its head the wrath of Alba during his sweep through the Low Countries to quell the revolt against Philip II. In November of 1576, his soldiers slaughtered 8,000 Antwerp citizens and destroyed 1,000 buildings in a single night, known ever since as the "Spanish Fury."

Instead of submission, however, this sort of intimidation gave rise to a brutal conflict that lasted from 1568 to 1648. Led by William the Silent and other nobles who raised private armies, the Protestants fought on doggedly until finally independence was achieved for the seven undefeated provinces to the north, which became the fledgling country of the Netherlands. Those in the south remained under the thumb of Spain and gradually returned to the Catholic church. As an act of revenge, Holland closed the Scheldt to all shipping, and the

once commercially dominant port of Antwerp, along with other Flemish cities, withered away to just a shadow of its former prosperity, though it continued to be a commercial center and a rising cultural force as Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck came to the fore.

The religious wars and economic hardship prompted many industrious Protestant and Jewish craftspeople to flee to Holland. These refugees took with them their mercantile skills and their businesses, including the diamond industry, leaving an impoverished economy behind.

THE MODERN ERA

In 1795 Belgium wound up once more under the rule of France. After the French reopened the Scheldt River that year and Napoleon Bonaparte built a naval depot in 1800 as a base for operations against the English, Antwerp came into its own again as a port.

It was not until Napoleon's crushing defeat at Waterloo—just miles from Brussels—that Belgians began to think of national independence as a real possibility. Its time had not yet come, however; under the Congress of Vienna, Belgium was once more united with the provinces of Holland. But the Dutch soon learned that governing the unruly Belgians was more than they had bargained for, and the 1830 rioting in Brussels was the last straw. A provisional Belgian government was formed with an elected National Congress. On July 21, 1831, Belgium officially became a constitutional monarchy when a relative of Queen Victoria, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, became king, swearing allegiance to the constitution.

Despite the coming of Belgian independence, the Dutch held onto Antwerp until 1832; and from then until the 1860s, they continued to exact a toll on ships sailing through the Dutch stretch of the Scheldt to reach Antwerp. Free navigation on the river brought with it a rapid expansion of the port, and since then Antwerp has never looked back.

The new nation soon set about its own version of the industrial revolution: developing its coal and iron natural resources, and rebuilding its textile, manufacturing, and shipbuilding industries. The country was hardly unified by this process, however, for most of the natural resources were to be found in the French-speaking Walloon regions in the south, where prosperity returned much more rapidly than in Flanders.

The Flemish, while happy to be freed from the rule of their Dutch neighbors, resented the greater influence of their French-speaking compatriots. Many viewed the acquisition of a French-speaking Belgian colony in the African Congo region as further evidence of domination by an oppressive enclave, and there were increasing signs of trouble within the boundaries of Belgium itself.

It took an invasion to bring a semblance of unity. When German forces swept over the country in 1914, the Belgians mounted a defense that made them heroes of World War I—even though parts of the Flemish population openly

Anatomy of a Revolution

The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–64) was appointed professor of anatomy at the University of Padua, Italy, where he produced his *De Humani Corporis Fabrica,* based on his dissections of human cadavers. He was criticized because his work overthrew many previously held superstitions and traditional religious tenets.

A New Art

Around the turn of the 20th century, Belgium produced one of the greatest exponents of the new Art Nouveau style of architecture and interior design, the prime materials of which were glass and iron, worked with decorative curved lines and floral and geometric motifs. The work of Victor Horta (1861–1947) can be seen in Brussels at the Tassel House (1893), the Hôtel Solvay (1895), and the ambitious Maison du Peuple (1896–99), with its concave, curved facades and location within an irregularly shaped square. His most famous building, the Innovation department store (1901), was destroyed by fire.

collaborated with the enemy, hailing them as "liberators" from Walloon domination. Still, tattered remnants of the national army, led by their "soldier-king" Albert I, held a tiny strip of land between De Panne and France for the entire 4 years of the war.

With the coming of peace, Belgium found its southern coal, iron, and manufacturing industries reeling, while the northern Flemish regions were moving steadily ahead by developing light industry, especially around Antwerp. Advanced agricultural methods yielded greater productivity and higher profits for Flemish farmers. By the end of the 1930s, the Flemish population outnumbered the Walloons by a large enough majority to install their beloved language as the official voice of education, justice, and civil administration in Flanders.

On May 10, 1940, the Germans invaded. The overmatched Belgian army resisted bravely but was soon forced to capitulate. As he did in most other countries he conquered, Adolf Hitler managed to gain a following in Belgium, and in particular in Flanders, whose Flemish *volk* (people) were viewed as fellow Aryans, though the Belgian Resistance was among the most determined and successful of the underground organizations that fought against Nazi occupation in Europe. On the other side, Flemish and Walloon quislings formed separate Waffen-SS formations that fought for the Nazis in Russia. In the brutal fighting on the Eastern Front, the Red Army virtually destroyed both of these units. Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp were liberated within days of each other in September 1944, following the rout of the German armies in Normandy. Antwerp was the target of German V-1 flying-bomb and V-2 rocket attacks long after the city had been liberated.

Some of the nationalist and political tensions of that period have lingered down to the present day. In 2001 Johan Sauwens, the interior minister in the Flanders regional government coalition and a member of the Volksunie (United People's) party, was forced to resign his office after attending a meeting of Belgian SS veterans. Their meetings and those of other extreme right-wing organizations, like the Flemish-nationalist, anti-immigration Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) party, which garners a quarter of the electorate in Flanders, and a third in their power base of Antwerp, often are guarded by paramilitaries wearing gray shirts, black ties, and Nazi and neo-Nazi regalia, and delivering straight-arm Hitler salutes.

The Blok, which has been kept out of power by a *cordon sanitaire* (ring-fence) placed around it by Belgium's other political parties, was effectively outlawed following a late-2004 ruling by Belgium's Supreme Court that it was racist. This forced it to reorganize and to modify its platform to exclude a plank calling for the expulsion of nonwhite immigrants (primarily economic migrants and their

Belgian-born descendants from Arab and other Muslim countries, and from other developing countries). Party boss Frank Vanhecke said of the ruling: "Today, our party has been killed, not by the electorate but by the judges. We will establish a new party. This one Belgium will not be able to bury; it will bury Belgium."

Impressions

Belgium suffers severely from linguistic indigestion.

—R. W. G. Penn, *Geographical Magazine* (March 1980)

At this writing, the party was considering relaunching itself under the name Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), and vowed to continue campaigning for independence for Flanders, for an end to non-European immigration, and for the departure of minorities "who reject, deny or fight against European culture and values like the separation of church and state, freedom of expression, and equality between men and women."

In 1993 the Belgian constitution was amended to create a federal state, made up of the autonomous regions of Flanders and Wallonia, together with the bilingual city of Brussels and autonomous German-speaking communities. The national government exists in a more-or-less permanent state of crisis due to the language and community divide, with ambitious regional politicians, particularly in Flanders, having pushed the country to the brink of dissolution. Still, rumors of Belgium's demise have been heard before and have always proven greatly exaggerated, and it seems likely the federation of semiautonomous regions will remain stable enough to see the country through.

2 Flanders Today

The inhabitants of Flanders (Vlaanderen), a semiautonomous region of the federal Belgian state, speak a derivation of German that evolved into Dutch and its Flemish variation (sometimes called *Vlaams,* but more often just referred to as Dutch, or *Nederlands*). Brussels is bilingual, French and Dutch.

In the provinces of West-Vlaanderen (West Flanders), Oost-Vlaanderen (East Flanders), and Antwerpen (Antwerp) you find the medieval cities of Bruges, Ghent, Mechelen, and Ypres (Ieper); the port and diamond industry center of Antwerp (once home to the great Flemish painter Rubens); and some 65km (40 miles) of Belgium's entire seacoast (in West Flanders). Flanders as a whole is home to 5.5 million inhabitants.

Folklore still plays a large part in Flanders's daily life, with local myths giving rise to some of the country's most colorful pageants and festivals, such as Ypres's Festival of the Cats, Bruges's Pageant of the Golden Tree, and the stately Ommegang in Brussels. In Belgium's renowned puppet theaters, marionettes based on folkloric characters identify their native cities—Woltje (Little Walloon) belongs to Brussels, Schele to Antwerp, and Pierke to Ghent.

After centuries of occupation by Spain, Austria, and France, whose power struggles tore Europe apart, Brussels now hosts the bureaucratic empire trying to bring it all together. Since the federalization of the state in 1993, Brussels (*Bruxelles* in French; *Brussel* in Dutch) has been a region on its own, a kind of Brussels D.C. Its area includes the city itself and a rim of surrounding territory, all of which lies within the borders of Vlaams-Brabant (Flemish Brabant) province—in 1995 the proud and historic province of Brabant was divided into Flemish and Walloon halves—but is administratively separate from it. Brussels, Belgium's capital, is officially bilingual, Dutch and French, although French is

predominant. But because this is also the de facto capital of the European Union (E.U.) and the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as of any number of international commercial, political, diplomatic, and lobbying organizations, the streets of Brussels contain a multilingual cacophony of languages that evokes the Tower of Babel. The population is around one million.

There's something of a tussle going on for the heart and soul of Brussels. Will this ancient city stick with the native Burgundian traditions that have given it a lifestyle that's the envy of more sober European cities, or will it go all the way with the "Capital of Europe" tag and see its unique identity subsumed by the juggernaut of Euro-this, Euro-that, and Euro-whatever? So far, the European dimension has been a mixed blessing, bringing in its train the demolition of vast tracts of the old city, and of individual architectural jewels, and their replacement by oceans of faceless, Eurocrat-housing of marble, glass, and concrete.

On the positive side of the ledger, the legions of well-paid and bountifully looked-after European civil servants, and the massed ranks of lobbyists, journalists, advisers, and consultants that lay siege to the various Euro institutions, have made formerly provincial Brussels cosmopolitan, and support an extensive array of international eateries. Besides, the old ways have shown a stubborn ability to survive and prosper—or, better said, to ignore the Euro city and all its works and get on with the more satisfying business of eating, drinking, and making merry. Few practitioners of this worthy art make a better job of it than the citizens of Brussels.

Among the challengers are the citizens of Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp. So historic is Bruges, the provincial seat of West Flanders, that the town has more than a little of the character of an open-air museum. Without a doubt, Bruges is one of Europe's most handsome cities, with an almost perfectly preserved center that seems more like a film set than a living city, because it throws your sense of time so out of joint. It was to Bruges that Catholic priests and nuns fled for safety during the religious persecutions of the late 1500s. Their housing quarters and places of refuge are there to this day; and when Bruges's perfectly preserved medieval beauty was brought to the attention of the rest of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, it became a mecca for tourists anxious to touch the past. Its historic buildings run the gamut of architectural styles from medieval times to the 19th century, and its picturesque canals add to the visual feast.

Ghent, the capital of East Flanders province, rivals Bruges in medieval charm and picturesque canals, but is not as all-round handsome as its rival, which is another way of saying that it's a more authentic, lived-in city.

Antwerp, the hometown of 17th-century art master Peter Paul Rubens, is in addition a diamond capital, and a massive port. And with it all, Antwerp protects and cherishes its cultural heritage. Today Antwerp is one of the major European gateways, with its port relocated some 13km (8 miles) downstream from the city proper. The docks and the petrochemical plants mixed in with them don't do much for the scenery in that area, and together they have swallowed up some perfectly innocent old villages, but the revenues and jobs thus generated don't leave much room for aesthetic considerations. The city's thriving diamond-cutting industry includes 4 of the world's 18 diamond exchanges, and its banking sector adds new luster to its commercial enterprise.

Outside the towns, the famous Flanders fields—immortalized in a famed World War I poem by army physician John McCrae—along the alluvial plains of the Scheldt River are actually polders, much like those in Holland, which

consist of land reclaimed after disastrous floods that began a few centuries before the birth of Christ and occurred time and again right up to the 10th century A.D. Extending some 10 to 16km (6–10 miles) inland from the sea, the polders create a landscape of rich farmland crisscrossed by canals and ditches lined with poplars and fields dotted with solitary farmhouses surrounded by their outbuildings. In medieval times these were the large land holdings of feudal lords and wealthy abbeys, and few have been broken into smaller plots in the intervening years. Farm boundaries today remain much as they were then.

Impressions

Our country has the unique advantage of lying at the crossroads of the great cultures of Europe.

—The late King Baudouin (1990)

During King Baudouin's 42 years on the throne, much progress was made in achieving harmony among Belgium's linguistically and culturally diverse population. During the 1970s efforts were made to grant increasing autonomy to the Flemish and Walloons in the areas where each was predominant, as well as to apportion power to each group within the national government and the political parties. Finally, in 1993 the constitution was amended to create a federal state, made up of the autonomous regions of Flanders and Wallonia, together with the bilingual city of Brussels and autonomous German-speaking communities.

Baudouin died in 1993, removing one of the pillars of unity. A much-loved monarch, his death was greeted with scenes of genuine national sadness that reflected most Belgians' high regard for him personally, and gave them an opportunity to show publicly their support for his goal of keeping the country together. Baudouin was a hard act to follow, and his successor, his brother King Albert II, while winning respect for conscientious effort in what is a difficult job, has not made the same personal connection with the people.

3 The Flemish Masters

The works of Hieronymus Bosch, Brueghel, Rubens, Van Dyck, the brothers van Eyck, and Magritte represent only a fraction of the treasures you see gracing the walls of Brussels's Musée Communal and Musée d'Art Ancien, the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, and Ghent's Museum of Fine Arts.

The golden age of Flemish painting occurred in the 1400s, a century dominated by the so-called Primitive artists, whose work was almost always religious in theme, usually commissioned for churches and chapels, and largely lacking in perspective. As the medieval cities of Flanders flourished, more and more princes, wealthy merchants, and prosperous guilds became patrons of the arts.

In the 15th century the function of art was still to praise God and illustrate religious allegory, but **Jan van Eyck** (ca. 1390–1441), one of the earliest Flemish masters, brought a sharp new perspective to bear on traditional subject matter. His *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,* created with his brother Hubert for St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, incorporates a realistic landscape into its biblical theme.

The Primitives sought to mirror reality, to portray both people and nature exactly as they appeared to the human eye, down to the tiniest detail, without classical distortions or embellishments. These artists would work meticulously for months—even years—on a single commission, often painting with a single-haired paintbrush to achieve a painstakingly lifelike quality.

The greatest Flemish artist of the 16th century lived and worked for many years in Antwerp. From 1520 to 1580 the city of Antwerp was one of the world's busiest ports and banking centers; as such, it eclipsed Bruges as a center for the arts. Many of the artists working here looked to the Italian Renaissance masters for their models of perfection. **Pieter Brueghel the Elder** (ca. 1525–69), who had studied in Italy, integrated Renaissance influences with the traditional style of his native land. He frequently painted rural and peasant life, as in his *Wedding Procession,* on view at the Musée Communal in Brussels.

Brueghel painted fewer than 50 oils (although he finished another 250-plus drawings and etchings), but he is still considered one of the greatest 16th-century artists. His works are filled with allusions and allegorical references to the politics and culture of the period, as well as with many plausible and explicit period details. Much of Brueghel's symbolism is obscure to us today, but it would have been clear to the contemporary Flemish audience full of hatred for their Spanish masters. The artist also had a fabulous, grotesque side, clearly influenced by the artist Hieronymus Bosch; see *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* in the Royal Fine Arts Museum (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts), Brussels.

In 1563 Brueghel moved to Brussels, where he lived at rue Haute 132. Here his two sons, also artists, were born. **Jan Brueghel** specialized in decorative paintings of flowers and fruits; **Pieter Brueghel the Younger** became known for copying his father's paintings.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) was the most influential baroque painter of the early 17th century. Born in Westphalia, Rubens and his family returned to Antwerp where he trained as a painter. In 1600 he went to Italy where he spent 8 years in the service of the duke of Mantua before returning to Antwerp in 1608. More than 2,000 paintings have been attributed to his studio. The drama in his works, such as *The Raising of the Cross* and *The Descent from the Cross,* both housed in the Antwerp cathedral, comes from the dynamic, writhing figures in his canvases. His renditions of the female form gave rise to the term "Rubenesque," which describes the voluptuous women who appear in his paintings.

Portraitist **Anthony Van Dyck** (1599–1641), one of the most important talents to emerge from Rubens's studio, served as court painter to Charles I of England, though some of his best religious work remains in Belgium. Look for the *Lamentation* in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp, and the *Crucifixion* in Mechelen Cathedral.

4 A Taste of Flanders

Almost every menu lists *garnaalkroketten* (croquettes stuffed with tiny, delicately sweet North Sea shrimp), which is filling enough for a light lunch and delicious as an appetizer. A very special treat awaits visitors in May and June in the form of asparagus, and from October to March there's endive, which is known as *witloof* (white leaf).

A tradition in Brussels is to cook with local beers like *gueuze* and *faro.* Also, look for great steaming pots of Zeeland mussels, which have a fanatical local following. Most places serve both a *plat du jour/dagschotel* (plate of the day) and a value-for-money, two- or three-course menu.

Flanders has added its own ingredients to the mix of Belgian cuisine. The Flemish share the Dutch fondness for raw herring, generally eaten with equally raw onions, while *sole à l'Ostendaise* and the small, gray North Sea shrimp are also firm favorites. River fish used to be the main ingredient of the Flemish souplike

stew called *waterzooï,* but today's rivers being increasingly polluted, chicken is now a more familiar ingredient.

If you're basically a potatoes person, you're in good company, for Belgians dote on their *steak-frites,* available at virtually every restaurant—even when not listed on the menu. Lest you think that *frites* in Belgium are the same as American french fries, let me enlighten you. These are twice-fried potatoes, as light as the proverbial feather. They're sold in paper cones on many street corners and (in my opinion) are best when topped with homemade mayonnaise, though you may prefer curry or even your usual ketchup. *Frites* will also accompany almost anything you order in a restaurant.

Seafood anywhere in Belgium is fresh and delicious. *Moules* (mussels) are absolutely addictive and are a specialty in Brussels, where you find a concentration of restaurants along the Petite rue des Bouchers that feature them in just about every guise you can imagine. (Ironically, Belgian mussels actually come from Zeeland in Holland and may, in fact, be the only Dutch products Belgians will admit to being any good.) *Homard* (lobster) also comes in a range of dishes. Don't miss the heavenly Belgian creation called *écrevisses à la liègeoise* (crayfish in a rich butter, cream, and white-wine sauce). Eel, often swimming in a grass-green sauce, is popular in both Flanders (where it's called *paling in 't groen*) and Wallonia *(anguilles au vert).*

No matter where you eat, you should know that **service** will be professional but not exactly speedy. Belgians don't just dine; they savor each course—if you're in a hurry, you're better off heading for a street vendor or an imported fast-food establishment.

Finally, a word on **Belgian chocolate.** Whatever the Swiss or anyone else might say to the contrary, Belgian chocolates are the world champs; they're so lethally addictive that they ought to be sold with a government health warning. They can also be wonderful gifts for friends back home. Those made by Wittamer, Nihoul, Neuhaus, and Leonidas ought to do the trick. Buy them loose, in bags weighing from 100 grams to boxes of 2 kilograms or more. Take a prepared box, or simply point to those you want, or ask the assistant for a mixture. Made with real cream, they do not keep well—but then you weren't planning on keeping them for long anyway, were you?

ON THE MENU

Aside from virtually any of your own favorite French dishes, you find Belgian specialties on every menu. The following are especially noteworthy:

Asperges à la Flamande Lovely, local white asparagus (the finest is said to come from the area around Mechelen) served with sliced or crumbled egg and melted butter for dipping.

Cheese There are more than 300 varieties of artisanal cheeses, each of which has a local following but is often little known outside Belgium. Try cheesy marvels such as Corsendonk, Passendale, Maredsous, Petrus, Château d'Arville, Wynendale, Rubens, and Le Regalou.

Chicon/Witloof Chicory, or Belgian endive, is wonderful when served wrapped in thin slices of ham with a topping of cheese sauce.

Crevettes/garnalen Tiny shrimp from the cold waters of the North Sea, served in a variety of ways (at Oostduinkerke some fishermen still fish them from horseback). Look for *tomates aux crevettes* (tomato stuffed with shrimp and mayonnaise) and *croquettes de crevettes* (crusty, deep-fried shrimp cakes).

Fun Fact **Belgian Fries**

Let's get this straight: "French fries" are really Belgian fries. U.S. and British soldiers serving in Belgium during World War I were served fries by folks who spoke French and, *voilà!,* a popular misconception was born. The modest Belgians didn't think to tell the troops they'd been eating Belgian fries for more than 300 years.

Frites/frieten The scandalously misnamed "french fries" are in fact a Belgian specialty, twice-fried and lighter than any you've ever encountered. They're served with steak or *moules* or in paper cones and topped with homemade ketchup or mayonnaise—if in doubt, don't hold the mayo, it's authentic and tastes fine.

Hareng/Haring Herring is eaten raw at the Flemish coast (where it's called haring) and is often served with raw onions.

Lapin à la Gueuze Rabbit cooked in Brussels beer—inexpensive, hearty, and delicious.

Lotte aux poireaux Monkfish with leeks and a cream sauce.

Moules/mosselen Mussels, a Belgian national dish.

Pain à grecque Though the name appears to mean "Greek" the name comes from the Dutch *brood van de gracht* (literally "bread from the canal"), which somehow got transmuted into French as *pain à grecque.*

Paling in 't groen/anguilles au vert Eel in a grass-green sauce.

Sole ostendaise Sole served with North Sea shrimps, mussels, and a cream sauce.

Stoemp Mashed potatoes and vegetables accompanied by sausage or meat.

Waterzooï op Gentse wijze A freshwater-fish stew originating in Ghent (although nowadays chicken is more often used).

BEER & GIN

What to drink with all those tasty dishes? Why, beer, of course! Belgium is justly famous for its brewing tradition, and this tiny country has more than 100 breweries producing some 450 different brews. Some are Pilseners, like Stella Artois, Jupiler, Maes, Primus, and Eupener. The majority, however, are local beers, specialties of a region, city, town, or village; some are made by monks. Each beer has a distinct, and often beautiful, glass, which is why you can instantly tell what everyone is drinking in a Belgian bar. Needless to say, with so many choices, it may take quite a bit of sampling to find a favorite. Among names to look for are Duvel, Chimay, Hoegaarden, De Koninck, and Kwak; and Faro, Krieklambiek, and Lambiek from the area around Brussels.

The most unusual Belgian style is *lambic,* a light, effervescent brew often infused with fruit flavors, which is made only in a small region near Brussels. Unlike the modern steel-tanks-and-gauges approach to brewing, *lambics* are left to ferment naturally in shallow open containers.

Then there are the heavenly tasting beers brewed by Trappist monks. There are once again six Trappist breweries in the land, since Sint-Benedictus of Achel, in Limburg province, restarted brewing in 1998, more than 60 years after the Germans confiscated the brewing plant during World War I. It rejoined the abbey

beers brewed by the monks of Chimay, Orval, Rochefort, Westmalle, and Westvleteren. The Trappist ales from the Abbaye de Notre Dame de Scourmont at Chimay in the south of Belgium are produced using a special yeast isolated by one of the monks after World War II. An extra helping of this yeast is added to the beer when it's being bottled to enhance its flavor.

For a digestif, you might try a gin, in Flanders known as *jenever* (or, colloquially, as *witteke*), and in Wallonia known as *genièvre* (colloquially as *pèkèt*). This stiff grain spirit is often served in glasses little bigger than a thimble. Belgium's 70 *jenever* distilleries produce some 270 varieties, some flavored with juniper, coriander, or other herbs and spices. Among notable brands are Filliers Oude Graanjenever, De Poldenaar Oude Antwerpsche, Heinrich Pèkèt de la Piconette, Sint-Pol, and van Damme. *Jenever* in a stone bottle makes an ideal gift.

Appendix B: Useful Terms & Phrases

The Flemish people you encounter will likely speak English every bit as well as you yourself do—some of them, annoyingly, perhaps even better. That said, no Fleming will fault you for having a go at Dutch (or Flemish, as it is often called in Belgium). In fact, they'll appreciate hugely any effort you make to string together words and sentences in their tongue-twister of a *taal* (language). An occasional *Dank U wel* (Thank you) and *Alstublieft* (Please) can take you a long way.

These lists of words and phrases should help you to get started, and help out in those rare situations where you are dealing with people who don't understand English. If nothing else, perusing the "Flemish Menu Savvy" glossary will give you something to do while you wait for the waitperson to take your order.

1 Basic Vocabulary

English	Dutch	Pronunciation
Hello	***Dag/Hallo***	dakh/*ha*-loh
Good morning	***Goedenmorgen***	*khoo* -yuh-*mor* -khun
Good afternoon	***Goedemiddag* (or *Goedenamiddag*)**	*khoo* -yuh-*mid* -akh/*khoo* -yuh-*na* -mid -akh
Good evening	***Goedenavond***	*khoo* -yuhn-*af* -ond
How are you?	***Hoe gaat het met U?***	hoo *khaht* et met oo?
Very well	***Uitstekend***	out-*stayk*-end
Thank you	***Dank U wel***	*dahnk* oo wel
Goodbye	***Dag/Tot Ziens***	dakh/tot zeenss
Good night	***Goedenacht***	*khoo* -duh-nakht
See you later	***Tot straks***	Tot strahkss
Please	***Alstublieft***	*ahl*-stoo-bleeft
Yes	***Ja***	yah
No	***Neen***	Nay
Excuse me	***Pardon***	par-*dawn*
Sorry	***Sorry***	*so* -ree
Do you speak English?	***Spreekt U Engels?***	spraykt oo *eng* -els
Can you help me?	***Kunt U mij helpen?***	koont oo *may*- ee *hel*- pen?
Give me . . .	***Geeft U mij . . .***	*khayft* oo may . . .
Where is . . .?	***Waar is . . . ?***	*vahr* iz . . . ?
the station	***het station***	het *stah* -ssyonh
the post office	***het postkantoor***	het *post* -kan-tohr
a bank	***een bank***	ayn bank
a hotel	***een hotel***	ayn *ho* -tel
a restaurant	***een restaurant***	ayn res-to-*rahng*
a pharmacy/ chemist	***een apotheek***	ayn a-po-*tayk*
the toilet	***het toilet***	het *twah* -let

To the right	***Rechts***	rekhts
To the left	***Links***	links
Straight ahead	***Rechtdoor***	rekht-*doar*
I would like . . .	***Ik zou graag . . .***	ik zow khrakh . . .
to eat	***eten***	*ay* -ten
a room for	***een kamer voor***	ayn *kah* -mer voor ayn nakht
1 night	***een nacht***	
How much is it?	***Hoe veel kost het?***	hoo fayl kawst het
The check	***De rekening***	duh *ray* -ken-ing
When?	***Wanneer?***	vah-*neer*
Yesterday	***Gisteren***	*khis* -ter-en
Today	***Vandaag***	van-*dahkh*
Tomorrow	***Morgen***	*mor*-khen
Breakfast	***Ontbijt***	*ohnt*-bayt
Lunch	***Lunch***	lunch
Dinner	***Diner***	*dee*-nay

USEFUL WORDS

Airmail	***Luchtpost***	*lookht* -post
Airport	***Luchthaven***	*lookht* -haff-uhn
Bus stop/Tram stop	***Bushalte/Tramhalte***	*boos* -haltuh/*tram* -haltuh
Cheap	***Goedkoop***	*khood* -kope
Church	***Kerk***	kerk
Cinema	***Bioskoop***	*bee* -oss-kope
Closed	***Gesloten***	*khuh* -slo-ten
Expensive	***Duur***	door
Firefighters	***Brandweer***	*brand* -vayhr
Free	***Gratis***	*khra* -tis
Hospital	***Ziekenhuis***	*zeek* -en-howss
Magazine	***Tijdschrift***	*tied* -skhrift
Newspaper	***Krant***	krant
Open	***Geopend***	*khuh* -oh-pend
Parking lot	***Parkeerplaats***	par-*kayhr* -plahtss
Police	***Politie***	po-*lee* -tsee
Registered post	***Aangetekend***	*ahn* -khu-tay-kend
Shop	***Winkel***	*vhin* -kuhl
Stamp	***Postzegel***	*post* -zay-khel
Theater	***Theater***	tay-*ah* -ter

NUMBERS

1 ***een*** (ayn)
2 ***twee*** (tway)
3 ***drie*** (dree)
4 ***vier*** (veer)
5 ***vijf*** (vayf)
6 ***zes*** (zes)
7 ***zeven*** (*zay*-vun)
8 ***acht*** (akht)
9 ***negen*** (*nay*-khen)
10 ***tien*** (teen)
11 ***elf*** (elf)
12 ***twaalf*** (tvahlf)
13 ***dertien*** (*dayr*-teen)
14 ***veertien*** (*vayr*-teen)
15 ***vijftien*** (*vayf*-teen)
16 ***zestien*** (*zes*-teen)
17 ***zeventien*** (*zay*-vun-teen)
18 ***achtien*** (*akh*-teen)
19 ***negentien*** (*nay*-khun-teen)
20 ***twintig*** (*twin*-tikh)
30 ***dertig*** (*der*-tukh)
40 ***veertig*** (*vayr*-tukh)
50 ***vijftig*** (*vayf*-tukh)
60 ***zestig*** (*zes*-tukh)

70 ***zeventig*** (*zay*-vun-tukh)
80 ***tachtig*** (*takh*-tukh)
90 ***negentig*** (*nay*-khen-tukh)
100 ***honderd*** (*hon*-dayrt)
1,000 ***duizend*** (*douw*-zend)

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Monday	***Maandag*** (*mahn*-dakh)
Tuesday	***Dinsdag*** (*deens*-dakh)
Wednesday	***Woensdag*** (*voohns*-dakh)
Thursday	***Donderdag*** (*donder*-dakh)
Friday	***Vrijdag*** (*vray*-dakh)
Saturday	***Zaterdag*** (*zahter*-dakh)
Sunday	***Zondag*** (*zohn*-dakh)

MONTH

January	***Januari*** (*yahn*-oo-aree)
February	***Februari*** (*fayhb*-roo-aree)
March	***Maart*** (mahrt)
April	***April*** (ah-*pril*)
May	***Mai*** (*mah*-eey)
June	***Juni*** (yoo-*nee*)
July	***Juli*** (yoo-*lee*)
August	***August*** (awh-*khoost*)
September	***September*** (sep-*tem*-buhr)
October	***Oktober*** (oct-*oah*-buhr)
November	***November*** (noa-*vem*-buhr)
December	***December*** (day-*sem*-buhr)

SEASONS

Spring	***Lente*** (*Len*-tuh)
Summer	***Zomer*** (*Zoh*-muhr)
Fall/autumn	***Herfst*** (Herfsst)
Winter	***Winter*** (*Vin*-tuhr)

SIGNS

Doorgaand Verkeer	Through Traffic
Doorgaand Verkeer Gestremd	Road Closed
Geen Doorgaand Verkeer	No Through Traffic
Niet Parkeeren	No Parking
Tentoonstelling	Exhibit
Verboden Te Roken	No Smoking
Vrije Toegang	Admission Free/Allowed
Wegomlegging	Diversion

2 Flemish Menu Savvy

BASICS

ontbijt breakfast
lunch lunch
diner dinner
boter butter
boterham sandwich
brood bread
stokbrood French bread
voorgerechten starters
honing honey
hoofdgerechten main courses
hutspot mashed potatoes and carrots
jam jam
kaas cheese
mosterd mustard

peper pepper
saus sauce
suiker sugar
zout salt
pannekoeken pancakes

SOUPS *(SOEPEN)*

soep soup
aardappelsoep potato soup
bonensoep bean soup
erwtensoep pea soup (usually includes bacon or sausage)
groentensoep vegetable soup
kippensoep chicken soup
tomatensoep tomato soup
uiensoep onion soup

EGGS *(EIER)*

eieren eggs
hardgekookte eieren hard-boiled eggs
omelette omelet
roereieren scrambled eggs
spiegeleieren fried eggs
uitsmijter fried eggs and ham on bread
zachtgekookte eieren boiled eggs

FISH *(VIS)* & SEAFOOD

forel trout
garnalen prawns
gerookte zalm smoked salmon
haring herring
kabeljauw cod
kreeft lobster
makreel mackerel
mosselen mussels
paling eel
schelvis haddock
schol plaice
tong sole
oesters oysters
sardienen sardines
zalm salmon

MEATS *(VLEES)*

bief beef
biefstuk steak
eend duck
fricandeau roast pork
gans goose
gehakt minced meat
haasbiefstuk filet steak
ham ham
kalfsvlees veal
kalkoen turkey
kip chicken
konijn rabbit
koude schotel cold cuts
lamscotelet lamb chops
lamsvlees lamb
lever liver
ragout beef stew
rookvlees smoked meat
runder beef
spek bacon
worst sausage

VEGETABLES/SALADS *(GROENTEN/SLA)*

aardappelen potatoes
asperges asparagus
augurken pickles
bieten beets
bloemkool cauliflower
bonen beans
champignons mushrooms
erwten peas
groenten vegetables
knoflook garlic
komkommer cucumber
komkommersla cucumber salad
kool cabbage
patates frites french fries
prei leek
prinsesseboonen green beans
purée mashed potatoes
radijsen radishes
rapen turnips
rijst rice
sla lettuce, salad
spinazie spinach

tomaten tomatoes
uien onions
wortelen carrots
zuurkool sauerkraut

DESSERTS *(NAGERECHTEN)*

appelgebak apple pie
appelmoes apple purée
cake cake
compôte stewed fruits
gebak pastry
ijs ice cream
jonge kaas young cheese (mild)
koekjes cookies
oliebollen doughnuts
oude kaas old cheese (strong)
room cream
slagroom whipped cream
smeerkaas cheese spread
speculaas spiced cookies

FRUITS *(VRUCHTEN)*

aapel apple
aardbei strawberry
ananas pineapple
citroen lemon
druiven grapes
framboos raspberry
kersen cherries
peer pear
perzik peach
pruimen plums

BEVERAGES *(DRANKEN)*

bier (or ***pils***) beer
cognac brandy
fles bottle
glas glass
jenever gin
koffie coffee
melk milk
spa mineral water
rode wijn red wine
thee tea
water water
witte wijn white wine

COOKING TERMS

gebakken fried
gebraden roast
gegrild grilled
gekookt boiled/cooked
gerookt smoked
geroosteerd boiled
gestoofd stewed
goed doorgebakken well done
half doorgebakken rare
koud cold
niet doorgebakken rare
warm hot

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